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THE FLUXUS MOVEMENT

Jean Brown

Interviewed by Richard Cándida Smith

Art History Oral Documentation Project

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BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

PERSONAL HISTORY:

Born: December 20, 1911, Brooklyn, New York.

Education: Columbia University.

Spouse: Leonard Brown, married 1936; two children.

ARTS-RELATED ACTIVITIES:

Jean and Leonard Brown began collecting contemporary art and archival materials relating to the dada and surrealist movements in the 1950s. Jean Brown organized the Jean Brown Archives at Shaker Seed House after the death of Leonard Brown in 1970. Her archives expanded the original dada/surrealist focus to collect materials relating to Fluxus, situationism, lettrisme, mail art, xerography, intermedia, and other neodada developments. Brown sold her archives to the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities in 1988.

Member, executive and advisory boards for museums at Amherst College, Mount Holyoke College, and Smith College, 1960s-70s.

INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER:

Richard Cándida Smith, Principal Editor, UCLA Oral History Program. B.A., Theater Arts, University of California, Los Angeles; M.A., Ph.D., United States History, University of California, Los Angeles.

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: Brown's home, Tyringham, Massachusetts.

Dates, length of sessions: February 24, 1992 (116 minutes); February 25, 1992 (139); February 26, 1992 (134); February 27, 1992 (90).

Total number of recorded hours: 8

Persons present during interview: Brown and Smith.

CONDUCT OF INTERVIEW:

This is one in a series of interviews intended to examine the development of art history as a professional discipline and conducted under the joint auspices of the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities and the UCLA Oral History Program.

The interview is organized by topic rather than chronologically. Major topics covered include the various Fluxus artists, particularly George Maciunas, and the assembling of Brown's archives.

EDITING:

Rebecca Stone, editorial assistant, edited the interview. She checked the verbatim transcript of the interview against the original tape recordings, edited for punctuation, paragraphing, and spelling, and verified proper names. Words and phrases inserted by the editor have been bracketed.

Brown reviewed the transcript. She verified proper names and made minor corrections and additions.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE

FEBRUARY 24, 1992

SMITH: The first question that we always ask is usually pretty easy and straightforward, which is when and where were you born?

BROWN: In Brooklyn, New York, in 1911.

SMITH: What date?

BROWN: December 20.

SMITH: Would you tell me a little bit about your family?

BROWN: You know, I have had this notion about this whole thing that nothing preexisting the archive and the marriage and the partnership I had with Leonard [Brown] should be included, because I consider it irrelevant.

SMITH: Oh.

BROWN: And, actually, any interest that people would have in me would be when I started working and what I did. Is that unfair?

SMITH: Well, I don't think we'll spend a lot of time talking about your childhood and your education, but the type of cultural background you had--

BROWN: My father [Irving Levy] was a rare book dealer. I was the youngest of five children. I think he must have liked me the best because I worked for him. And he took me around to museums. He was a great museum goer and

obviously liked taking me with him. He was separated from my mother [Ray Levy]. He was not a very good husband, hardly any of a father, but I had this attachment with him.

SMITH: Did you live with him or with your mother?

BROWN: No, with my mother. He showed up periodically, and that's when we'd go off. As I got older I worked for him a little bit and--

SMITH: In his bookstore. Where was his bookstore located?

BROWN: In Manhattan on Cooper-- Where's the Cooper Union--? Cooper Square. But, you know, the contacts were not frequent and consistent. They just weren't. And he wasn't very nice to my mother, I always thought. But it may have been-- Sometimes when my children used to ask me about my past, I'd say, "My God, I adored my mother. She was wonderful." But actually it must have been my father who focused me, just took me around. And I worked for him.

Then during the Depression, you know, you went where the job was. I got a job in the library in Springfield [Massachusetts], and there I met my Leonard. And after a whirlwind courtship of four years--

SMITH: Four years? [laughter]

BROWN: --we were married. There isn't anything of

significance that happened after that. I just had the story of a married life, as so many are.

SMITH: A few more questions about the early part of your life and-- By the way, what did your mother do?

BROWN: Took care of the five children the best she could.

SMITH: Were art and literature and music a part of your family life?

BROWN: Well, my father brought it with him when they were living together. And my mother seemed to have a great reverence for it. He must have interested her, inoculated her with it, because she had a special feeling about art. But with no knowledge. Just the word and the word "artist," that conveyed something very special to her because of the way she pronounced it.

SMITH: What about your education?

BROWN: I took a couple of library courses at Columbia [University], but I never had a degree. Whatever I felt would train me to be a librarian, I took--as a day student, not matriculating. And that was where my background came from.

SMITH: So then that led to your job in Springfield. Was that your first job, the Springfield one? First full-time, or first real, job?

BROWN: Probably. Yeah, I would take any job I could, because my mother needed the money. I did the best I

could being the youngest of five. That worried me. I wanted her to have enough. I felt very custodial about my mother, actually. My father was an aesthete. Loved everything like that, and that was his business. He painted, he sang. He had great artistic aspirations.

SMITH: Was he interested in modern art, contemporary art at the time?

BROWN: No. But he took me to see it. He'd just take me by the hand and to the museums we'd go, starting at the Brooklyn Museum, starting with the ancient Egyptian. I saw lots of mummies. But he trundled me, and I think I used to go fairly often with him, whenever he turned up. He was never around a great deal of the time.

SMITH: You mentioned yesterday that at eighteen you wanted to change the world. What did you mean by that?

BROWN: Well, I wanted-- You know. What do we all aspire to? A better world. And I wanted to have a big hand in it. Of course, this was also during the McCarthy era, and people weren't being political activists really. I mean because of that fear thing of [Joseph R.] McCarthy.

But I think that basically I turned to dada. (I wrote that down in my notes. I made some notes for you so I know I mean it.) Because I could make a political statement in that way. Dada was originated in Switzerland, which was a neutral country during the First

World War. Well, you know the way boys in the Vietnamese war went to Canada to escape the draft? I think that everybody who came to Zurich had a similar reaction to war. And of course, you know, it started out as a highly political movement, which I seem to have loved.

I should tell you though, too, how I got onto dada. Leonard-- Now, this is where I'm bad at my dates, but I can check it out or the boys [Jonathan and Robert Brown] will remember. Lenny died ultimately of cancer of the liver. But in the fifties at some point, he had a coronary attack--severe. And at that time one stayed three weeks in the hospital, and it would be like a three-month period of convalescence. Now, what would Leonard do with his time? He had an insurance business. Leonard was in insurance. He was a great activist. He played golf, he played baseball, he-- You know, what does a man who is restricted from all these things do?

Well, at that time we knew Robert Motherwell, whose book The Dada Poets and Painters had just come out. His answer to "What are you going to do--?" We had a charge account at Wittenborn's. Robert Motherwell sent up his book, The Dada Poets and Painters, and a couple of other small books--I don't even remember the names of them. But Leonard looked at them and said, "Jean, these are crazy. I want my forty bucks back." Robert Motherwell had

charged them to our account. He wanted the forty bucks back. And I looked at him and I said, "You're right, Leonard, they're crazy. But I like them."

That started the quest for dada. And Leonard was very, very supportive of this effort. All our trips to Europe, everything we did, was because of our search for dada/surrealist material, which was available and you could pick it off the shelves. Now, I should remember the year, but we'll piece it together some way. Leonard loved the works of art in which he indulged himself, but was very good to me. And because it was so easily available--really it hadn't surfaced on a public scale, still a pretty unknown movement--we could find a lot of it. And then the people who had it in Paris, who had all the material, were thrilled that we cared and that we would be bringing it to America. So it grew and it grew and it grew. We made several trips amassing that material. And what there is of the dada/surrealist portion of the collection are mainly the things we got in Europe.

SMITH: Had you done art collecting before then?

BROWN: Pictures. Leonard loved works of art. I will show you that [Enrico] Baj--I don't know whether it belongs in this context or not. Leonard bought that. There was a whole exhibition of generals by Enrico Baj, General de Gaulle, General Eisenhower. That painting is

his dealer, Arturo Schwarz. He made him a general. And Leonard fell in love with the generals. The whole exhibition was sold out. And Leonard said to me, "Jean, before we leave Paris, I'm going to get a general. You wait right here." And I waited in the hotel room. He was gone for about two hours, and he came back and he said, "I have a general. General Schwarz." Arturo. And so that's how much he-- You know, he had a strong feeling. When he wanted something he had a great deal of determination. And I teased him a lot because I used to call him "the general." "General Electric." "General Motors." "General Foods." [laughter] He was, I think, a strong enough figure to be made into that kind of authority figure.

But we went to Europe and people got to know us--I said that before--and they were very glad to have us be so interested. La Hune-- Do you know La Hune, a bookstore in Paris?

SMITH: Yes.

BROWN: Bernhart Cheerbrant-- What was his name? I don't remember it. He brought things up from his country house for us. Jean Hugues, another dealer. I don't know whether he's still one or not. He loved us because we shared the same passion. They were very, very helpful and very supportive and did everything they could possibly--

We just went around. At the end our trips to Europe were mostly in quest--

SMITH: Of dada.

BROWN: And surrealism.

SMITH: Were you interested in futurism at all?

BROWN: No. Knew about it. All of these things are not encompassable, I think. Someone once told me there were over a hundred thousand Bauhaus papers. Well, that would have been too much, you know. And somebody was doing Bauhaus by that time. Really dada and surrealism, other than Baj and Robert Motherwell here certainly-- I don't know whether you know the book Dada Poets and Painters. It's a great book, because it has articles by the members of the movement. He just simply collated them all and put them into a book. It's still the best book, I think, on the subject.

SMITH: When you started collecting dada and surrealism, did you have any kind of method to what you were doing? Would you say, "I've got to get one of this and one of that?"

BROWN: I made a list of things. Probably by using the bibliography of the Motherwell book. I should tell you that briefly, though, after Leonard was well enough to get out of bed, we went to Florida. On our way to Florida we stopped at the Museum of Modern Art to see Bernard Karpel,

who was a librarian of the museum, and asked for his help. And he was very excited and pleased too. That didn't work out unfortunately, and I know why. Just as I would not want to be terribly involved with the Getty [Center for the History of Art and the Humanities] collection-- It isn't your collection, you know, if you have somebody else doing it for you. Ultimately you want to have your voice heard in it. So we worked with him for a while and he helped, but it didn't work out. Then we went out on our own, which we should have anyway, to make it ours, I think. I have a real strong feeling about people who buy things that they don't have any conviction about. And I was pretty determined.

SMITH: So you started out by collecting the classic dada, classic surrealism, European--

BROWN: Went to Zurich to see the Spielgasse, the Cabaret Voltaire. A real pilgrimage kind of thing was the way I approached it and wanted to know as much as I could. And dada/surrealism was highly available then. You know, it doesn't exist anymore.

SMITH: So you collected [Kurt] Schwitters, I presume, and [Tristan] Tzara and--

BROWN: [Max] Ernst, Tzara, Hugo Ball, Jean Arp. We just amassed a huge quantity of it.

SMITH: Now, these were artworks that you-- No? Papers.

BROWN: Pamphlets, papers, books, only the bibliophilic material. Then after Leonard died and I moved here [Tyringham, Massachusetts], I did say to Jon one day, "You know, Jon, I have all this material and I'm not doing anything with it. It bothers me. It should be put to some use." Just sitting on shelves, dormant, all that stuff.

Before I had talked to Jon, there was another collector, Mr. Hans Sohm, a dentist in Stuttgart. I have been to see him too, by the way, and he was wonderful. Gave me a lot of stimulus to go on. I loved what he had. And Sohm put Ken Friedman in touch with me. Ken was going to come and help me, because it was a big job by then. He had collected Fluxus, too. I had started Fluxus by then. I wish I remembered the date, but I don't. And Ken was coming to help me. Ken, by then, had mountains of his own material which he wanted to bring. I said, "Don't bring it!" This was very fortunate, because I never would have been able to detach myself from it. Ken arrived at four o'clock in the morning, called me from a pay booth in town, came in his bus. He kept calling me collect en route all the way. I'd get these collect calls from him. And then he arrived at four o'clock in the morning and he called me. I was flabbergasted. I said, "Ken, would you do that to your own mother, wake her up at four o'clock in

the morning?" He laughed. He said, "Well, I would know where my mother was. I wouldn't have to call her."

SMITH: I want to talk about Ken Friedman in more detail, but let's do that later. I'm interested in the period before you really got involved with Fluxus.

BROWN: Well, that consisted mainly of getting lots of auction catalogs and buying material. Our trips buying from catalogs also, trying to complete the whole corpus of dada and surrealism. Tristan Tzara was probably the biggest activist of all. He wrote to Paul Dermee. Somewhere in the Getty collection are Tzara's letters to Dermee to move the movement to France, over to Paris, really. So it was a kind of next step. Lots happened at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich. I have all that stuff at the Getty.

SMITH: You said you thought you were an activist. Did you mean by that that when you get involved with something, you're very passionate about it?

BROWN: Obviously I was about that. Before then, I was a housewife really, except married to quite an exceptional man. I do think that.

SMITH: Now, you said Leonard had an insurance company.

BROWN: He was an insurance agent in Springfield. But he went to Brown [University]. I used to see things that he had written for the Brown bulletins and journals. And he

wrote poetry. Why, I compare him to-- Now, who's the great poet?

SMITH: Wallace Stevens.

BROWN: He was a Wallace Stevens kind of man.

SMITH: Did he retire when he had the heart attack?

BROWN: We went to Florida for several weeks. That was so he could recuperate--a convalescent period--and then he went back to work. He died in '70. He was very good to me about doing this dada/surrealism and very helpful and very permissive. He must have liked it somewhat. He liked me.

SMITH: Well, it sounds like it was a joint effort.

BROWN: I couldn't have done it without him.

SMITH: Was there a division of labor between the two of you? I mean, you focused on certain sorts of things and he focused on another?

BROWN: Well, he always told me what his opinion was and he footed the bills. I couldn't have done it.

SMITH: What other interests besides art did the two of you have?

BROWN: We came to Tanglewood every concert. That's how we ended up here. We went to galleries. We read a great deal, heard a lot of music. Read a great deal. He was a reader, I was a reader. But the difference was that he was a typical American male, what we call one hundred

percent American man. He liked to play golf. He was an ardent golfer. But still indulged me. He would have preferred to buy pictures instead of documents. I was pretty determined. I didn't realize how much so until I saw what we had amassed.

SMITH: Why do you think you had a greater interest in the bibliographic stuff then?

BROWN: I liked books. I have a great passion for books still. I'm a reader. I think I mentioned yesterday that with pictures on the wall, eventually they impart everything in them. If you have them, then you see all of them. One gets finished with them. But books are endless. You can just open it randomly, at any point. I just like the handling of it and what it contains and reveals and still feel very much that way. And if I were to ever do any more, I would do it in the same way.

SMITH: But you also were collecting art objects as well as part of the--

BROWN: Fluxus was all very strongly art objects. There were those funny little boxes that you've seen, and so of course.

SMITH: Before we get into Fluxus, what about the paintings and collages and assemblages that you had?

BROWN: I gave them all to the boys.

SMITH: How big of a collection did you have?

BROWN: Jon will help you there. I don't remember. There are some lovely little Ernst collages within the chronology of the movement.

SMITH: So you would buy paintings and collages as-- Was that more for Leonard's interest?

BROWN: He always consulted with me, but my heavens, he was so indulgent to me. He should have whatever he wanted, I think. I thought then, I think now. He should have exactly what he was pleased to have.

SMITH: I thought you had mentioned yesterday that your art collection had been on loan to Princeton [University].

BROWN: Had been on loan to Princeton. I just gave it to the boys. And they have been selling it off, I think, and have benefited greatly. But after all, I would want it to be that way. They are my sons.

SMITH: In terms of your pursuit of dada, I'd like to talk a little bit about the artists that you met. I know that you did meet Marcel Duchamp at one point.

BROWN: Yes. Well, I thought I would catalog the dada collection myself, do a catalog as an homage to Leonard-- "The Leonard Brown Collection of Dada/Surrealism." Then I got the brilliant notion of having Marcel Duchamp do the cover design. I wrote him a letter asking him if I could meet with him because I had a matter to discuss with him. I didn't get an answer for three or four weeks, but then

he called. He had just come back from Mexico and he was very interested and would like very much to see me. "And when would be convenient?" I asked him. He said, "Tomorrow." So I went to New York. I drove down and back in one day--we were living in Springfield then. He was lovely.

I had somewhat of a checklist of the contents of what we then had. He would be delighted to give me-- Well, I wanted something of his. He gave me the detail. I knew that I would have to come back to Leonard and report and he would ask me the cost of it, I knew that. So I asked Marcel Duchamp what the cost would be, and he said to me, "I give it to you." Very interested in the project. What he gave me was--and this was funny--the Tu m' painting with a corkscrew and a check. It's at Yale [University]. He gave me a detail of that. He said he would write to George Heard Hamilton and tell him that I would be there and make the arrangements to provide what he wanted me to have. George Heard Hamilton was just moving from Yale up to Williams [College]. "I know Duchamp's letter was in the moving," he said, "but I can't find it." That was strange, wasn't it? I think at the end I found it.

SMITH: So you were able to get it, then.

BROWN: Well, I never did the catalog. I got so involved in Fluxus, etc. Then Leonard became ill and passed away,

and I came up here not knowing very much about this house. We had bought it. We would come on weekends--arrange to have workmen do a certain amount of work, then we'd come up on weekends. Leonard was then very busy and probably not very well either, at the time.

George Heard Hamilton lost his copy, I told you. A while later, I came up. One day I put all the books I had--everything I had--on the floor and started arranging it into categories, do my guidelines. Focused in on the things that were the next link in the trajectory of dada/surrealism so it didn't just die. Many things happened to it. I had the feeling that many other things had happened because of that. I organized my guidelines for everything that was meaningful to me. Some things I wouldn't collect because they were not in context. Pop art would be picked up and it would become such a mass thing that there was no point in my doing it. Whatever I had of that I sent on to other museums and libraries who were interested. So I could eliminate. And then I made my categories, and they were all in there.

SMITH: The checklist to your collection at the Getty?

BROWN: I don't know exactly how Eric Vos has made his division, but I know how I made mine. And an archive was being formed.

SMITH: Let me get back to Duchamp. When you were doing

your research, did you go down to Yale and look at the Société Anonyme material?

BROWN: Of course one moves logically. Because [inaudible], and that was why I did it. And then I told you, I had already written about Fluxus. Fluxus has intrigued me enormously. By the way, Leonard and I used to go down to the Something Else Press office--Dick Higgins's place--and I would get a lot of everything, all of his output. I used it for gifts, I used it for a lot of things. I got to know Dick. When I came back from Germany I knew I had to get in touch with George Maciunas. I had written to him. I'd get funny letters back, anonymous letters, sometimes containing just a few items. Finally I went to see him and rang his doorbell.

SMITH: Down in Soho.

BROWN: Eighty Wooster Street. His nameplate on the door as "Dingdong" with a rubber thing you could squeeze that would produce the dingdong. I pressed it. He came to the door in a few minutes. And I said to him, "I'm Jean Brown, and I want everything of Fluxus." He invited me in and he was very cordial, and then I started to get all of it. He said I had all of it, probably all he could remember.

SMITH: There was something that Claudie [McGuire] mentioned to me in an anecdote. She told me that when you

saw Duchamp he told you something to the effect that serious artists have gone underground--

BROWN: I asked him that question. Well, this was at another occasion. I was on the executive board of the Mount Holyoke College [Art] Museum, and they invited him up for a day and they very generously invited me and Leonard. And we went. Then we took him back from South Hadley [Massachusetts], where Mount Holyoke is, to Springfield to catch his train, and we had a discussion about it. He thought that art was becoming a very popular commodity, a consumer commodity. It was then that I asked him what would happen to artists who were really seriously dedicated. He did say to me that they will go underground, which I made out to be like the monks in the Middle Ages who worked in their little cells, producing great things. That was the analogy that formed in my head. What he meant by that I don't know, but he said that serious artists will go underground.

SMITH: From your way of thinking, did that affect your collecting in the sense of how you defined who's a serious artist and who is not?

BROWN: No. You see, I was working within the framework of movements. Although I didn't have futurism, I had conceptualism, I had op art. I made some notes in the book. All that stuff. All that jazz. I didn't think I'd

find it so fast. Yeah, that's surrealism. Fluxus. Lettrism became part of it. It was interesting, because [Isidore] Isou, who was an organizer of lettrism, was Romanian like Tzara. Romanians turn out to be interesting people. I did situationism, visual poetry. Well, conceptualism, op art, I told you that. Performance. Those things were founded by dada/surrealism. The situationists and the Russian-- What do you call that? Not exactionists, expressionists--

SMITH: The constructivists?

BROWN: Constructivists. Yes. All these are interrelated. I never did the Bauhaus, which was a big one, but someone once told me I couldn't have anyway, that there were already a hundred thousand documents that went with Bauhaus.

SMITH: So your goal always was to find as much documentation as you could for each of these movements.

BROWN: Yes. Anything relating to their activities I tried to get.

SMITH: I'm still somewhat interested in your life with Leonard and the interest in art. I'm wondering to what degree you went down to New York and were following the contemporary art scene. You said you knew Motherwell. Did you know any of the other abstract expressionists?

BROWN: No, but we had a strong interest in their works,

actually. We would go down to New York. One could go down to New York and back in one day from Springfield. You covered then all the existing galleries. I met John Marin's daughter, who says the same thing. She lives up in Maine. She says she could go into New York and visit six galleries and she'd see all there was to see. I should remember the names. I could, I think, if I had to. [Leo Castelli, Samuel Kootz, Sidney Janis, Downtown Gallery, Betty Parsons, and Stable Gallery]. But the whole scene has changed so dramatically.

SMITH: Did you know Robert Rauschenberg or Jim Dine?

BROWN: Robert Rauschenberg stayed at our house in Springfield. No, he came up to-- He was performing at Hartford [Connecticut], when he danced with--

SMITH: He worked with Merce Cunningham, did set designs and that.

BROWN: I had at that time-- Who came with him? Billy Klüwer. You know that name?

SMITH: No.

BROWN: The scientist who worked on lasers and was very, very interested in the arts and did settings. He stayed at my house twice. Rauschenberg was in that party. [Claes] Oldenburg came to our house in Springfield. That may have been another time.

SMITH: Had you and Leonard bought work by Rauschenberg?

Combine-painting or--?

BROWN: We didn't get them all. We just couldn't get them all. I have a small Rauschenberg, but of course it's now with the boys. Leonard wanted a combine, believe it or not. That was my error in judgment, actually.

SMITH: What do you mean by that?

BROWN: I didn't push for it. I said, "Oh, he's so young, Leonard. We'll have other opportunities." But, you know, once they got past a certain cost we just couldn't have them.

SMITH: Now, did Leonard have a limit as to what he was willing to spend on a painting?

BROWN: No. I mean, he had a limit to his funds, but never set a price. When he loved something he would want it, and he would somehow arrange to get it. A small Rauschenberg--that is with the boys. A [Willem] de Kooning, Dine, two Franz Klines. Mostly the abstract expressionists.

SMITH: And Jaspar Johns, Robert Indiana?

BROWN: No.

SMITH: I noticed you have up there on the wall the Bruce Conner.

BROWN: Leonard had a passion for him, by the way. I think we had three or four. (I don't know how, but by some very strange coincidence, my Bob, who was going to BU

[Boston University], was able to sublet an apartment that Bruce Conner had taken. And Bob sublet it from Bruce.)

When we got to Paris every year, there was a marvelous gallery there, Galerie J it was. A young lady ran it and was the lady of Pierre Restany. Does that mean anything to you? And every year after we checked into our hotel, we would go right over to Galerie J. They were by then very good friends of ours. We had this ongoing polemic in which they'd say Picasso was the greatest, and Leonard and I would say Duchamp was the greatest. And this would go back and forth constantly. We just resumed the following year. Jeanine de Goldschmit her name was who had Galerie J. We asked her if there was anything we could help her attain--if she wanted any. She said, "The only one who interests me is Bruce Connor." Came back, Bruce, by some coincidence, was having an exhibition in London. Why doesn't he send all the works over to Galerie J? Which he did. In London he sold none. In Paris he sold five, which was pretty amazing I think, because-- I don't know, do you consider him an internationally known artist?

SMITH: For a brief period he was. Then he disappeared.

BROWN: Well, Leonard just loved his things. I think we ended up with five--

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE TWO

FEBRUARY 24, 1992

SMITH: You said he [Bruce Conner] came to visit you in Springfield and turned off all the lights.

BROWN: And then using the walls, started showing his films. We started hearing music. It was just like a carnival. He just transformed the whole house. He was a fun man. This is very free expression, isn't it?

SMITH: That's fine.

BROWN: I would prefer it that way, frankly.

SMITH: Okay.

BROWN: When a psychiatrist first meets a client, they just, you know-- He knows her as of then, and if there is a need to refer back to the past, they do it that way. That's the methodology. And I really think I like that. So I'm really free associating.

SMITH: Bruce Conner was sometimes considered-- Well, he was often written about as if he was neodada. He didn't think of himself as neodada, but did you think of him as neodada?

BROWN: Yes. I did indeed. The materials he used and the way he used them were very typical, I think. His films were wonderful. I think he composed the music that was played that day, too. So he could perform musically also. He came, I think, with his wife and baby. Then he went

back to California, and we lost track of him.

Someone wrote me a letter once wanting to do a big, big retrospective of Bruce Conner, and I would have been very interested in supporting it. I don't know whatever happened. Maybe the man dropped it. I don't recall.

SMITH: Did you know John Cage at that point? I'm talking about the fifties or sixties, before Leonard died.

BROWN: No. Dick knew him very well. Dick Higgins talked about him all the time.

SMITH: When you went to New York did you go see any of the Living Theater or the happenings? Did you know Allan Kaprow?

BROWN: Went to happenings. Went to Living Theater performances. Never met Kaprow. Good friend of Bob Watts. Did Bob want to bring him once? I don't remember. Kaprow's wife [Alison Knowles] came. She was starting a big woman's art movement in California. See, all of the Fluxus correspondence is out there at the Getty. I sent it because it was part of the archive. I told you my personal letter files I still have. I use them.

SMITH: You said yesterday that you were very much of a modernist.

BROWN: Yes. I think so.

SMITH: What do you mean by that? Why do you think of yourself as a modernist?

BROWN: Well, I think it's important for me to relate myself to my time on earth, is what I call it. It's the only chance I will have, as far as we know, of our time on earth, and I wanted-- This is it for me. This is when I'm alive, and to be my most alive I should relate to it now as much-- And whatever.

SMITH: I wanted to ask you also about the circle of friends that you had. You sent me that funny little postcard saying--well, I've got it right here as a matter of fact--"I never expect my friends to be interested in what I do."

BROWN: Nobody really cared. You know, many people who came to our house, I never took them upstairs because they weren't interested, really.

SMITH: These would be your personal friends?

BROWN: Social friends. They laughed at it. Some of them resented it. Others they really just couldn't relate to it in any way. And I seemed, I think, very, very strange to them.

SMITH: What about the art that you had? Did they think that was strange?

BROWN: Very, very--laughed about it. Made fun of it.

SMITH: Who were your social friends?

BROWN: Typical. Middle-class. Your typical middle-class American couples that one would meet. Those were our

friends.

SMITH: So the people you'd meet in the course of work and--

BROWN: Social life.

SMITH: Work and social life in Springfield.

BROWN: Completely unrelated. They were not interested. We had one couple who were friends of ours who collected master drawings. I must say I was more interested in their master drawings than they were in my things. I think they just didn't know how to make anything of it. Just didn't know how. The way a lot of people felt about modern art at that time--but it was ludicrous--"My grandchild can do that." And Picasso's answer was, "He must be a genius." But we went ahead and did it anyway.

Then I collected mail art. I just got this the other day from one of my mail artists.

SMITH: Oh. Who's this from?

BROWN: Chuck Welch. The Crackerjack Kid. I love his things. He makes his own paper. He wrote and asked me to do-- You see, I don't do anything anymore. I'm not able to. But I got this funny thing from him. He wanted me to write. It could be whatever I wanted to write. It could be as short as I wanted it. And I answered him. I can't tell you why. That's where I got this picture. Charming, isn't it.

SMITH: Yeah.

BROWN: I like the Crackerjack Kid very much. I liked all the people who came. Why I responded to him, I can't tell you. That was what I responded to.

SMITH: Well, "the mother of mail art" he calls you in this letter. Do you feel that's the role you played?

BROWN: I found it fascinating. I must say that. It was again a protest thing like dada, artists who couldn't get in galleries or museums, but they wanted to do their art. You know, they developed this form. They were able to work it out that way. Some of it was really junk mail. Some of it I thought was really good. Well, the whole notion appealed to me enormously, that you could-- You know, that this thing could exist independently of everything else. I don't think the Getty knew about it. But I just saved a large corpus of it. It was a fascinating thing. When I wrote my thing for Crackerjack Kid, I said that one of the works I liked very much was by Ben of Fluxus. Ben Vautier of Fluxus. He made a card up which he called "The Postman's Choice." It was identical on both sides. A place for the name, the address, and a stamp on both sides. Filled out to be sent to two absolutely unrelated people in unrelated places, and he called it "The Postman's Choice." The postman could deliver it to whichever one he chose. And then I said

that I thought the cumulative power of mail art, say millions of letters supporting Amnesty International-- I just think anything could be done with it, that this could be a very, very powerful medium. And therefore I liked it for that, too. That sort of fell in with my dada thing, which was again a protest. When Dick was here with [J. M.] "Mel" Edelstein, I think he told Edelstein that he credits me with originating two things. I did a lot with xerography. That I know was one of them. I can't remember what the second was, whether it was this or not, mail art. It might have been, but I'm not sure. I don't remember. I'm sure Dick doesn't either. Unfortunate. Xerography I know was one. That I'm sure, because I remember his telling it. The other thing I can't remember, but maybe he will.

SMITH: What did you do with xerography that got it going in this movement?

BROWN: I liked it very much. I would commission people to do xerox work. After the lithograph, it was a next stage and very inexpensive.

SMITH: Color or black and white or--?

BROWN: Both. Then I got a letter one day. I don't know whether you know about the Mohammed project. His name was Plinio Mesculiam from Genoa, and he told me he was starting a project. Would I send him the names of ten

people so that he could get it going in America? Off the top of my head. I didn't look for ten names. I just wrote the first ten names that came to mind and I started it. And it is an incredible project. I think even the Getty understands that. Leo Castelli got in--everybody. It was irresistible. I always wanted to be sure that everybody understood that I was not an artist, that I was a collector. I didn't want any confusion about that, because it could be misleading, but even I got into that. It was just an irresistible thing. I think there must have been well over a thousand, some of which are very good. Some of which, you know, you wouldn't commission anyone to do. But that was a marvelous thing. And I had other xeroxes. I had a whole bunch of them.

SMITH: Did you commission people to do mail art? No. Okay.

BROWN: I wanted always to do something very big about that, though, because I thought it was just such a great idea. Wrote on postage stamps--rubber stamps. Well, I saw that an artist in France was doing a collection of rubber stamps by artists. Did you see it there?

SMITH: Yes.

BROWN: Hervé Fischer's. I asked him if I could have it for the archive, and he said, "You may have it. One collection is going to the Bibliothèque nationale in

Paris, the other to the Bibliothèque nationale in Brussels," he said, "and the third one's coming to you." And he came and he delivered it. Just loved it. Just loved it. He was also very proud of the fact that he had titularization at the University of Paris. He had tenure. Very young. And of course at that point deconstructionism was starting. You know about that. And I asked him about it, and he was just wonderful. He said, "Those people, I don't like them. I don't like them. They're intellectual tyrants." He said, "I want nothing to do with them." That would be-- Who are they? Well, you know, [Roland] Barthes--

SMITH: Or Jacques Derrida.

BROWN: Yeah, Derrida. He [Hervé Fischer] didn't like them at all. And then he came and he brought Estampes des Artistes in a very special binder. I don't know that I ever made special note of that to the Getty. You know, I just would like them to know what they have, but I think they're finding out--don't you?--as they deal with it more and more, that there are certain things-- That's an outstanding corpus, and so is Mohammed.

SMITH: Which is the color xerography.

BROWN: I'm sure I have over a thousand of those. Some of them are quite magnificent, and even I went into it. That was funny. Someone I know who's Lithuanian showed me the

Lithuanian Who's Who and George [Maciunas]'s father's entry in it. He was an engineer. And underneath it I put something that George had written me and combined these, but I sent it in. I thought enough of it to want to be part of it. It was such a fun thing.

Mohammed had an exhibition in the public library, I think, at Genoa. It was like a forest. He sent me photographs--like a forest of xerox. It was just really overwhelming. I found it most satisfying. And of course, as I said, inexpensive. Again, the protest thing. The fine arts thing, the big reverence for what? I never could figure out what the big reverence was.

SMITH: The reverence?

BROWN: The reverence for art. Never could quite-- When Jackie [Jacqueline Bouvier] Kennedy borrowed the Mona Lisa for an exhibition in this country, oh, Jon and I made up all kinds of funny jokes about it. We were in Paris at that time. The Mona Lisa picture was down, and there was a little notice that the picture was down because it was on loan. There were as many people looking at the space as there would have been to look at the Mona Lisa. It was manna. Sacred ground. Then Jon and I-- At one point, I got a radio news bulletin. I called him to tell him that the Mona Lisa and the Pietà came to this country at the same time and they passed each other on the Jersey

Turnpike. One was going on to New York and the other was going to Washington. The Mona Lisa and the Pietà passed each other. We had fun with it. It was just a fun thing. I think that I must say that the whole idea of this was to provide merriment, because I felt I couldn't live here in, you know, this old household and old village and all the things that happened. I had to create a liveliness to it.

SMITH: This was after Leonard died.

BROWN: No, I hadn't moved any material yet.

SMITH: Oh, I see.

BROWN: Helmut Wohl-- I think I started to say this to you before, but the idea was that-- This is in context with Ken Friedman. Jon came to me-- I was upset because it didn't work out with Ken. And I thought I needed some help, and if it was going to be a study collection I better make it the best study collection possible. So Jon came up. Soon after he came, Friedman left, and he said, "Mother, you don't need Ken." All of this stuff was just lying on my shelves. I wanted to do something with it. It should, you know, provide some use to somebody. He said, "You don't have to do it." He said, "I will make up an announcement for you." He did and he sent it to all of the schools in this country which have graduate departments in fine art. And the people in Europe were already starting to come, because they knew us, and

anytime they needed anything, they had connections enough who would tell them where to find it. So I had a lot of visitors there. But the stuff was used, and that made me feel very, very much better about it. Now, why did I say that? Why did I introduce that? That's way out of context.

SMITH: I had maybe a couple of more historical questions.

BROWN: Sure.

SMITH: You had mentioned yesterday that you knew a couple of artists in the WPA [Works Progress Administration]. So you were friendly with artists--

BROWN: No, I knew of them.

SMITH: Knew of them. Oh. You didn't know them personally.

BROWN: Yes. I just remembered that project and what it provided for artists. And I must say they were very happy. The ones I knew of were very happy to be part of it, because what else would they have done? They didn't have enough money to sustain themselves, really.

SMITH: The other thing I wanted to ask you was your experiences in World War II. Did Leonard go off to the service?

BROWN: I had both boys. He was induction exempt. Then he also took a night job at one of the factories that was producing weapons. He was married with two sons, and the

likelihood-- I don't remember what age he was, but I know we talked about it and discussed the possibility of it. And then he did take this job doing defense work of some kind.

SMITH: Had he already been an insurance agent when you married him?

BROWN: No, that was after I married him. I was the one who had the job, as a librarian. Leonard was jobless. But then he did get the job, what year I don't remember, '32, '36. Maybe around '39 or '40 he started in the insurance business as a clerk to this man who was an insurance agent. When the man retired, Leonard bought the business and worked it up into a very good thing, as you can observe. The world's been very good to him. And he was also very good to it. He had great expertise in his field, too.

SMITH: You've used the word "protest" several times in relationship to art, but then you brought in Amnesty International. I'm wondering the degree to which you've been involved in political protest.

BROWN: Not really. You know, it's impossible now after McCarthy and after the Vietnam War. What could one do? You know, how could one make a positive contribution of any kind? I don't know how much I made anyway, but I remember once getting a call asking if we would put in an

ad in the Springfield paper about protesting the Vietnamese war, which we then did. Leonard and I both worked for Henry [A.] Wallace [1948 presidential campaign], and that was a kind of-- We used to meet on Sundays at our house, all the protestors, and I can remember Jon coming in-- He was a little kid then. I wish I knew the dates of all this, but I don't. He walked into the room where we were all sitting, and he said, "Oh, the patriots are here again." He was then a little kid. But we supported Henry Wallace, did whatever we could. There's not very much one can do, and I think it becomes less and less.

SMITH: Was Springfield a strong Republican town?

BROWN: Oh, Leonard was also a Republican in public office. I forgot to tell you that.

SMITH: Who, Leonard?

BROWN: My Leonard came home one night-- When he started insurance, he started with a man named-- The George Ezekiel Company. Leonard came home and said, "You know, I met Paul Ezekiel on the street today. And Paul said to me, 'Gee, with your name Brown, letter B, you'd be at the top of the ballot. Why don't you run for public office?'" He would be an alderman from our district. And I said, "Leonard, that's a great idea. Why don't you try it?" We set up a whole political machine. He was elected. He

served two terms. He got more votes than the mayor that first time. The letter B was right at the top of the ballot. And he was acting mayor as alderman. I guess he was voted into acting mayor--or else a job he automatically had with that. That is unrelated. You know that was something he couldn't do much good with.

It's very hard to make an impact politically. It's even worse now, but it was difficult then, too. How does one, really? I like the idea of standing up and being counted and having it matter. I still like it. I realize the hopelessness of it, but I still like the idea of having it matter. Duchamp told me that he never voted in his life, because he said, "I don't think politics has ever accomplished anything." Do you think it does?

SMITH: Well, it accomplishes everything for a lot of people. It depends on what you want to accomplish and what power you have. It's a fact of life. It's like the weather.

BROWN: Unless one removes one's self, which is very difficult to do. But if it's not doing any good, why involve him? That was how I found all of Duchamp's judgments--on a very high plane. I approved, is what I'm saying.

SMITH: Now, how many times did you get together with him [Duchamp]?

BROWN: He wanted very much to come to Springfield, but soon after that he died. See, at the very end-- I came in on the last gasp of so many things. I don't know how you've done with other people, but I do like to free associate I find. So I'm almost like a psychoanalytical session.

SMITH: Well, I wanted to go back to after Leonard's illness and death. What led you to really focus and expand the archive at that point?

BROWN: Well, we had this house. My life in Springfield, I thought, was over. Leonard was gone. The business was gone. The boys were gone. And I had had my Springfield tenure, I thought. Where would I go and what would I do? Because I was in my fifties, and what would I do with the rest of my life? I just decided I'd come up here.

SMITH: You had already bought the house.

BROWN: We had the house. It was being--never restored--cleaned up. It was run down. We had the house two years.

SMITH: It was like a weekend house, then, for you?

BROWN: We didn't stay. We just came up to see what progress was being made. We'd take a ride, and then we'd go back.

And then what would I do with the rest of my life? All the material that I had and how to use it and how to make it interesting and functional. Then Helmut Wohl

called me. I told you Jon sent notices to every art history program with a graduate program. I was here one day and Wohl said, "Hah? You have a lot of things. You have a lot of things on Duchamp, and I have a study course on the graduate level of students who are doing Duchamp." I said, "Oh, I am so embarrassed." I said, "I don't even have the things here. They're still in Springfield." He said, "I'll be over in ten minutes anyway." Which absolutely floored me, because I had nothing here. I didn't know where he was coming from. It finally got across to me how he had heard of me. He came and he visited for a while, and he brought his whole group to Springfield and we had a long, long session. And it was very useful. They could handle Duchamp, you know. A real involvement with it. And they had done it a lot already, but a lot of the things I had they had never seen. It was a very, very good session and made me more confident about the collection's potential.

SMITH: So this would be about '72 or something?

BROWN: Helmut Wohl called me-- Jon would remember. He mailed the announcement without telling me. That's why I was so flabbergasted that the guy was coming.

SMITH: Oh, it was after Ken Friedman. We're talking '73, probably.

BROWN: I'm glad you know, because I don't.

SMITH: You listed the areas that you were interested in, and we've discussed somewhat why dada. But what about some of the other areas, like--?

BROWN: Well, they followed. They just logically followed. You could never have had Fluxus without dada and without Duchamp. You could never have had conceptual art, one of the great things that-- Marcel Duchamp said this many, many times, that he wanted to remove art from the purely retinal and return it to the service of the mind. And that was where my interest in it lay, really.

SMITH: What about the Situationist International? What was the--?

BROWN: A very logical follow-up of dada/surrealism. I did lectures in there too. The situationists, they would create a situation. They were extraordinarily effective. It just ended abruptly. But a lot of the strikes and the student protests in '68 in Paris were all situationist in concept. I stockpiled that for a long time. I had a great deal of it. I don't think I had it all, but I had a lot of it.

SMITH: Did you contact Guy Debord?

BROWN: Never did. How did that start? [Michelle] Bernstein, who was one of the first situationists-- I have her mail upstairs in a file. I have to find it. I would sometimes get mysterious letters. You know, people hear

of me. I asked her if she would send me whatever. She was a real activist with Debord in it. Would she send me her things? She was in England. She sent me things. I sent her things back. There was an exchange. I sent her some of the surrealist bulletins. I don't remember exactly what I sent her, but I may have it written down someplace. She was very pleasant. She was very good, provided me with whatever she had. Then there was a group in California, a situationist group. Do you know it? I got stuff from them. They translated Debord's--what is it?--Society of the Spectacle. Picked that up. There's an active situationist group there. I've been in touch with them. And they did the translation. Of course that followed very, very logically again. And lettrisme followed very logically. And Fluxus, too. Trying to pinpoint the-- To direct the next link in the trajectory is the way I think of it. And it worked fine.

SMITH: I'd like to talk about the limits that you set to your collection.

BROWN: Well, I had laid out everything on the floor, the guidelines, frame of reference. And I made up my categories. Some things I couldn't deal with, I knew that. Pop art would be very well taken care of without me. I thought of the marginal things, the interstitial kinds of things that maybe people wouldn't pick up on and

there should be a record of them someplace. And if people hadn't come I think I still would have done it, you see. I thought there needed to be a record somewhere of these activities.

SMITH: And your goal from the beginning was to do a study collection?

BROWN: Was to have the material. And the next thing was, "Oh, well, now I've got it. What use is it to anybody?" That was one of the nice things about the Getty acquisition of it, because they would treat it the same way I did. And I wanted it to be used.

SMITH: What was the balance in your mind between acquiring artifacts, objects, and acquiring documentation?

BROWN: Well, the Fluxus things were mostly all objects. If I was going to do Fluxus, I would have to have lots of objects, because George made them all. Artists would send him their prospectus and then he would execute them brilliantly. Everything I have I think he put together. I don't think anybody else did it.

SMITH: Well, you have those Fluxboxes that are Bob Watts's Fluxboxes.

BROWN: George made the label and George boxed them. He executed them. They were always ideas of other people, but he executed them. It was fascinating, that little box idea he had. Labeling. He did wonderful labels.

SMITH: But sometimes-- I mean, some of these things are just like he got a regular notions box and put light bulbs in each one of the sections.

BROWN: Section them off, yes. Yes, well, the light bulb thing, I remember them.

SMITH: So it was George who actually made the box and selected the light bulbs and put them in?

BROWN: Yeah.

SMITH: And then put the label on that says "Fluxbox by Bob Watts"?

BROWN: That was all George.

SMITH: That's interesting.

BROWN: I think he wanted to control it. But they were uncontrollable, as most artists were. Artists at that time did the same thing. George Maciunas made himself a pope. And the Fluxus people, not all of them would agree. As you see, that George Brecht work, that's absolutely independent of any Fluxus association. But then one came to like the individual artists, too. I liked them enough to want to have things of theirs.

SMITH: You mentioned yesterday that you had made a decision that you were going to purchase everything. Why was that?

BROWN: I thought that I should do it on a professional level. Otherwise it would be a very strange mix, wouldn't

it? I just wanted it understood that this was a kind of arrangement for which I would send money if they would send me things or whatever else I wanted. I sent blue jeans--they were on the black market in all Eastern European countries. It was the wish of every one of them to have blue jeans. I would do anything to make a viable bargain between us.

SMITH: Did you get donations of material?

BROWN: Well, I sometimes got things, and that was very difficult. Uncommissioned things. Things would just come. I didn't like that at all, because I really didn't order them, you see, in any form. They just appeared, and that was hard. And what could I do about that? I never quite resolved the things that came to me, just came to me. I would try to always send something back. It was a very strange arrangement, I think, part of it. It was much better for me if I knew a price and then I could pay.

SMITH: It did seem to me that some people sent you unsolicited objects with--in a sense--a letter asking for money.

BROWN: If I could do it, I did it. I tried to always in some way.

SMITH: Now, what were the limits that you set yourself? I notice you're always telling people that you are on a very limited budget in doing this.

BROWN: I only had so much money and big ambition.

SMITH: And did you set yourself a monthly allowance for this? What were the kinds of limits that you set for yourself?

BROWN: If I had the money, I'd buy it. That's all. Those were the limits. If I could afford it, I'd buy it. The commissioned things. The unsolicited things I don't know what I did. It was very difficult.

SMITH: Were you setting aside a percentage of your income for this?

BROWN: No. When I ran short of money--I had a monthly allowance--I bought a lot of things on installment. I sent money every month. John Furnival, I had a lot of his stuff. I love his things, and I bought them on installment from him. He was once in New York and he called me. My first question was, as I'm greeting him, "Do I owe you any money, John?" I didn't think I did, but I wanted to be sure. He said, "Owe me money?" He said, "You have paid me so far beyond anything that I could ever provide." So I knew I didn't owe him any money. I got a lot from him. He then started sending me his personal mail, so I have his archive.

SMITH: I noticed that. How did you set your prices?

BROWN: Well, mutual agreement.

SMITH: Would they suggest a price? Did you bargain much?

BROWN: Well, I had to set a price. I don't know whether I was bargaining. I just had to know how much things would cost and if I could afford them.

SMITH: Some of these questions get back to qualitative judgments. I noticed in a Saturday Review article on you from October 30, 1976, they quote you as saying that you avoided making any kind of qualitative judgments.

BROWN: Oh, my, yes. I still don't do it.

SMITH: But deciding to send one artist $3,000 and another artist $50 is a qualitative judgment, isn't it?

BROWN: No. To my mind, just by looking at something I know how much work went into it and how much effort was made, and I pick a number. Obviously as long as the artist was satisfied and would transfer whatever it was to me and there was agreement-- And I told you, I was pleased that I didn't get any letters of complaint. I knew I tried very hard to be fair. I hope I was. I wanted it to be by mutual consent. And the fact that nobody ever wrote me and told me--

SMITH: But when you decided to set out to do the collection, to really build a collection on the interstitial--I think that's the word you used--aspects of--

BROWN: Of art,

SMITH: --of art, you had mentioned yesterday that one of

your problems was there was no market rate established.

BROWN: Yeah. You know, usually there's a price tag on art. If you acquire something, you're going to have to pay to get it. There was no price tag, so how much do I pay you? "How much do you want?" is what I would first ask. I'm afraid to say that I didn't do it always with the mail art. But then again, an unsolicited kind of thing, what do you do? I think I tried, in many instances, to do something in return. I wanted to very, very much because I thought the artists deserved it, that's why.

SMITH: But wasn't one of Ray Johnson's ideas--? And of course mail art actually did exist before him, but--

BROWN: He had a very big hand in it.

SMITH: That was to get art out of the system of commerce and return it to a sort of barter-exchange relationship, a friendship level.

BROWN: Yeah. I bought some of Ray Johnson's things from other people to whom he had sent them. He came here once. He was very surprised to see them, but I had purchased them. I wanted Ray Johnson because I thought he was a seminal figure in the whole thing. And I wanted his work.

TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE ONE

FEBRUARY 24, 1992

SMITH: I was going to say that it's a question that does appear to wave in and out of your correspondence, and it really gets symbolized by this question of [George] Maciunas and Bob Watts's Fluxboxes, but the question of authentication and the signature. When is something the work of a particular person, and does it matter if it's the work of a particular person or not?

BROWN: Well, I think that Fluxus was kind of a collective in George's mind. I don't know. He wanted complete control of all the output of all the Fluxus artists. Well, they wouldn't agree, you know. They just wanted to do work on their own and did. He couldn't control, but what he could, he did. And he was wonderful to them. He was so good to them, actually.

SMITH: I was thinking-- Like with Plinio Mesculiam, there's a whole thing getting the signature on the color xerox so you would know which were the authentic ones.

BROWN: Are they signed?

SMITH: Well, a lot of them are, and a lot of them weren't, but it struck me that the whole point of xeroxing is that it is infinitely reproducible, so why worry about it?

BROWN: Yeah. That's what delighted me about it. Right out in the public domain, removing all the sacrosanct intimations of it. I love that idea. It should be for everybody, and that was a good way to do it. This is after the transfer to the Getty [Center for the History of Art and the Humanities], but I've got a notice somewhere in here--but I don't know where it is--of a fax exhibition. That would be the next step. I know that if I were still around and doing it I would have thought of that too. But this was from someplace in Europe, the first exhibition of fax art. I loved it. I really think that it belongs to everybody. I would put everything in the public domain. This eliteness of art--I did it, I was guilty of it--doesn't make complete sense to me.

SMITH: Well, when you pay money for an art object you are, in a sense, buying into the eliteness of art.

BROWN: True. I did it. Absolutely.

SMITH: But it sounds like-- I mean, in a sense you're doing it because personally you needed to support the people that were involved in this.

BROWN: I must not be totally against it, because I was a party to it. But I liked this other notion better. The artist would never even be known or heard of. Maybe this was a way. And then of course I loved using the mails. The mail became the gallery, the museum. I've always had

an enormous network of this.

SMITH: Once you got going on this, how did you discover people? How did you determine who you needed to talk to?

BROWN: Everybody was so good to me. Oh, I was bereft when I came up here. Nothing to do, in a strange place. I felt my boys [Jonathan and Robert Brown] should know what I had done, how I got started, so I told them. I sat down one day and wrote twenty-five letters about wanting to collect these certain materials. Almost everything was a response to those letters. How wonderful people were. They not only responded to me, they put me onto other people. And the network became larger and larger.

SMITH: Who were the twenty-five people that you--?

BROWN: I don't remember.

SMITH: Do you remember who the key people were?

BROWN: No. But I could think of it if I had to.

SMITH: Was Hans Sohm one of them?

BROWN: No. Sohm I had been to see, and he was very, very generous to me. He just gave me free run of the whole place and all the information I required.

I should show you this. This is my own postcard collection. This is from the woman living near Albany who sent me a work a day. Amelia Etlinger. I have a lot of her art.

SMITH: A work a day. For how long?

BROWN: For many, many days. I had an awful big bunch of it.

SMITH: Did you pay her for all of the work?

BROWN: Never. She wouldn't take it. She would be insulted. She wanted this place to be the repository. Oh, I sent her things. I sent her gifts. I remember that. Because I wondered so hard about how I could repay her. I'll show you some of the other things she did. Here's another mailbox. She sent me this. My mailbox.

SMITH: Well, Michael Scott?

BROWN: Michael Scott, who came here with his wife. He was a real artist. Upper-middle-class Englishman, but he loved it.

SMITH: So he had a regular job. He had a business or whatever.

BROWN: Oh, yes. I think it was an affluent one, too.

SMITH: And he would do the mail art as creative expression.

BROWN: Pure sport. Just for fun.

SMITH: Sport. That's a good word, sport, isn't it.

BROWN: This one is by Ginny Lloyd. There's a rubber stamp that somebody made of me.

SMITH: Oh, yeah, I've seen that. Yeah.

BROWN: With the Guggenheim [Museum] on my head, which is quite a burden.

SMITH: Yeah. Oh, the Galántais [György and Julia] from Hungary.

BROWN: The Galántais from Hungary.

SMITH: You helped get them a visit to the United States.

BROWN: That was weird. The person who was giving it called me and called me and called me, and then she said that they were getting a $5,000 grant. Should she send it to me? And I said, "I don't want it. I would send it to the embassy in New York. Just send it to somebody who will then assume the responsibility for it."

This is a sandwich. The Getty's still buying things of art enclosure. I don't know whether you know them or not. Memo Memorandum was a project that Robin Crozier dedicated to me.

SMITH: Memo Memorandum? Did you commission it? No?

BROWN: Never paid him for it. Probably sent them things. And Chris Crozier still calls me fairly often, because they are very dear friends whom I will never meet, but that's a fun thing. He did a lot of fun things. Memorandum is a--

SMITH: Have you ever been tempted to unstaple and look at what's inside the sandwich? No?

BROWN: I accepted it as a sandwich. What a great idea for a piece of mail art. This is one of Emmett Williams's. He's a fun man. He and his wife [Anne Williams] and child

[Gary Williams] spent times here and loved to be here. I bought his collection, too, by the way.

SMITH: I noticed that. You bought his papers.

BROWN: Everything. He brought it down. I bought it.

SMITH: How much did you pay for that?

BROWN: For that collection?

SMITH: Yes. Do you recall?

BROWN: I wish I could, but I don't.

SMITH: Was it a lot of money?

BROWN: No. If it was an awful lot of money, I couldn't have had it. I gave him whatever he asked, and he was very pleased to have it. I also bought Ben Patterson's collection. I don't remember how much I paid for that. But all these fun things, these I keep. And I love them. They're my jewels.

SMITH: So a lot of this became really a set of personal friendships for you in a lot of cases.

BROWN: Not all, but I had a steady stream of visitors to use the collection, to meet me. It was a very busy place.

SMITH: So with the artists in particular it became not just you or a person who would buy the stuff, but that you became--

BROWN: I was supportive and friendly and tried to be. I met all kinds of people. I remember a particular incident when the Gerlovins [Rimma and Valery] came and they

brought a Polish critic with them, and my son Bob called me-- Bojko. What was his first name? Bojko. I had a list, but I find it's upstairs. Bob knew him because of Bob's poster dealing. And he asked me how the visit was. I said, "Bob, don't ask me, because I don't remember a thing." I don't even remember where they slept. There were eleven, twelve, thirteen people sleeping in this house. I don't even remember where. We had a party. It was great. It was the night of a big, big blizzard, I remember that. And when I said to him, "Bob, don't ask me. Please don't ask me, because I don't remember a thing that happened," I said, "And I don't care if I don't talk to anybody else in my life again." I had overextended my abilities. It was just too much, and it was unforgettable for that reason. And Bojko. What was his name? He went to the Rhode Island School of Design for a year. Interesting man.

SMITH: I'm sure it's probably in the checklist. [Symon Bojko] When you developed this kind of special relationship, did you also get to know other collectors? Did you get to know the Silvermans [Gilbert and Lila] at all well?

BROWN: They came here. Wanted what I have of Fluxus. I don't know if this is for publication.

SMITH: Well, we can seal things.

BROWN: He gave me a check for $1,000. Said he'd be here the next morning. The next morning when he came, I gave him his check back. I said, "I've never sold anything in my life. I don't know what you'd expect to get, and I don't know what I would be supposed to give you." So I returned his money. Do you know the [Ruth and Marvin] Sackner collection?

SMITH: Yes.

BROWN: Very big, important. They came. I have a lovely letter from them somewhere in which they said they would like to start a Jean Brown archive of the South. And that was fun, too. That was my strongest desire, to get other people to start collecting. I tried to so hard. They came here with Hansjörg Mayer, I think it was. Hansjörg Mayer.

SMITH: Who?

BROWN: The publisher Hansjörg Mayer.

SMITH: Oh, okay.

BROWN: I had everything of his. I loved that press. I loved him. The Sackners said they would like to start a Jean Brown archive of the South. That was the biggest turn-on I could get, if other people would do it, too. Because I believe in these people in the archive.

SMITH: How did your collection differ from, say, the Silvermans' collection?

BROWN: Well, first of all, they had a lot more money than I. Second of all, I think he's made two global trips in pursuit of Fluxus. I could not have done that. He sent every Fluxus artist a check for $100 asking for a ten-word definition of Fluxus. It's in one of the catalogs. George Brecht's says, "Two pounds of shit in a one-pound bag." But I admire him enormously, because Silverman was willing to undertake a risk. And Sackner, too. I wish I had done-- Well, I would have been doing it for my artists, not for-- Yes, I would have loved to extend the thing as much as possible.

SMITH: There was another collector, or someone who was a promoter at least. Robert and Rhett Delford Brown?

BROWN: They just came here once.

SMITH: That's not your son, I take it.

BROWN: No. He was a performance artist. He had a kind of a stir briefly, very briefly. And then I think they disappeared. I don't know where they are. Maybe Jon Hendricks knows. I don't know.

SMITH: How did what you were doing fit in with things like Franklin Furnace?

BROWN: I had a great contact with them. Martha [Wilson] was very nice. She wanted me to show my collection. By the way, I had a no-lend policy. Because if people came or were coming all the time, when they were traveling a

great distance, their needs might be out on loan. Better to keep it all here and let people work on it here. Martha Wilson called me one day and asked me, "Break down. Break down. Show your collection here." I said, "No, I won't, Martha, but are you interested in underground Russian material?" I had two Russian people who came, the Gerlovins. I don't know whether you--

SMITH: Oh, the Gerlovins, Rimma Gerlovina and Valery Gerlovin.

BROWN: They came here. They came here because of an Italian artist that I know who had been here, and she said, "As soon as you get to the United States, you have to visit Jean Brown." And my Italian friend was a wonderful story, too, the woman who sent the Gerlovins. But they had an exhibition of samizdat art at Franklin Furnace, which launched them. And they loved me. I don't hear from them anymore.

SMITH: What about the Clocktower?

BROWN: I used to collect the announcements. Then George had one big Fluxus event there which was tremendous. He used the Clocktower and the clock. And that was a fun thing. I went to that.

SMITH: What I'm wondering is, since you had this very informal network of people who were sort of squeezed out of the gallery/museum system and you had a handful of

collectors--and you're one of them--and then you had these alternative art spaces, how it all worked together, the kind of role that you wanted, that you envisioned for yourself.

BROWN: I wanted their records. I just wanted those records someplace on earth. That's all. I wanted to keep them. They were worth preserving to me.

SMITH: But did you see yourself in some way not only supporting people but giving them the ability to continue doing their work, maybe helping them in the dialogue with the work they were doing?

BROWN: Also I think the primary intent was a record of these events, which might not have been kept by anybody else. Because I wanted the history, the background, very good archival material. I don't know how anybody else would have done it--I think very differently, certainly--but that was my methodology. Sackners do it the one way, Silvermans do it another. I'm very supportive of them because they made a real commitment, you know, the way that I did. And so many people of means just, as far as I can see, squander it all because they are unwilling to make that commitment.

SMITH: Jill Johnston, I know she started doing research and--

BROWN: I bought some stuff from her. She's doing Jaspar

Johns. Do you know her?

SMITH: Well, I know of her. I don't know her personally.

BROWN: She called Jonathan. She called me to get Jonathan's number a few weeks ago. She's doing Jaspar Johns, and I guess she sees some connection between the-- Velásquez was the one that she called me about. (There's my Jon with the king of Spain. See him? In that photograph. Keep it right there, boy, for all the world to see. All the world. Nobody ever comes. But I see it. Two good-looking guys.) But she was doing something. I gave her Jon's number.

SMITH: Let's wrap up for today. Could you just, for the record, tell us a little bit about your sons and their interests? It does seem both of them followed in the art world.

BROWN: I take no credit for it. It was a fluke. Because I think that, you know, what I was doing, really I never inflicted it on either of them. I don't even think they knew. Then suddenly Jon went to Spain--junior year in Spain, went to the Prado every day, and came back saying he wanted to be an art historian. Bob then discovered art by poster artists and started to deal in that.

SMITH: Poster art seems to have a lot in common with what you're talking about.

BROWN: Oh, a lot of the artists I had did posters. But

he really wanted the poster artists. And that's what he went off to Europe for yesterday. Of course, he must have certain things which people want. But he really created a branch of collecting, you know.

SMITH: Did you ever think, in terms of the artists you were dealing with, of trying to connect them with Robert so they could do posters that could be marketed?

BROWN: Well, I don't know how that would have been. I never did offer, because I think he had a whole different sense of poster art than I did. A lot of very great posters went to the Getty. I don't know what they're doing with those. I had some really great ones. Some of them might have needed a little restoration. But there were really great ones in there.

SMITH: In 1972 you wrote in a letter that it has been your ambition for a long time to assemble a complete Fluxus collection. So I wanted to ask you, what does a long time mean? Ten years did it go? How far back did your desire to move from dada into Fluxus go?

BROWN: Oh, I don't think it went back that far, that it's memorable in any sense. I would have just said that maybe.

SMITH: Oh, okay.

BROWN: I was very interested in-- Leonard was with me then. Every time we went to New York we would go to

Something Else Press and buy their publications. Dick [Higgins] was a seminal figure in that. But I don't know that I talked to him a lot about it. I'm not sure that I knew what he did. And I told you mysteriously sometimes--I must have written to somebody, but mysteriously I'd get a small package of something, no return address. I think that was a George Maciunas joke. He would just send me things. No return address. Little funny objects. As you know, they are little funny objects. My boys arrived at where they are. I take no credit for it at all. They just got there. Something grabbed them and there they were doing it. They used to tease me unmercifully about my art collecting.

SMITH: Really?

BROWN: They would deny it now. And when I mention it sometimes they say, "Oh, mother, that was so long ago. You know, everything's been altered since then." And I suppose it has.

SMITH: Jonathan had mentioned on the phone to me that art was a very important part of the family environment as a child.

BROWN: Well, then he thinks so. See, he thinks so. It would be better to get their opinions on that, I think.

SMITH: And then one last thing. In terms of your goals, your general goals when you collected something from

somebody, were you interested in getting individual pieces? Or if you made a decision that someone was going to be in your collection, did you want to get everything?

BROWN: Well, that would depend. I might look at something and say, "My, this is so fascinating I want more of it," or I might have just wanted whatever came at that time. I don't think I was rigid about that at all. I think I was rigid about my guidelines of what would be in the archive. But then I don't know that I needed more than that.

TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE ONE

FEBRUARY 25, 1992

BROWN: George [Maciunas], when he went out to look at places, he decided he would settle here. I asked a real estate agent I knew to take him around. And she took him to New Marlborough [Massachusetts] to this place which was on the market. I was gone, as I told you last night, to visit my mother [Ray Levy] every day, so they went off and I went off. And when he came back with Stephanie [Barber], he said, "Jean, I have found a medieval village." And I said to him, "George, pray, what is a medieval village in the late twentieth century?" But when I went to look at it, it was. It could have been. It was about twenty buildings--very horsey people had owned it--with lots of stables and barns. It had two houses on it. One of them had paneling from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It was an elegant, very, very let-go but elegant. If it were returned to its former state, it would have been a very elegant place. And there was a bandstand in the middle of all these buildings. It did look like a village. It could have been a village in the period he mentioned. And he was going to buy it.

He didn't have a button either. But somehow he got enough money. He always called Bob Watts his partner.

Bob was his partner in all ventures in Soho. Whatever they did, Bob Watts was his partner. And his sister Nijole [Maciunas Valaitas], she helped, and he got enough for a down payment on the place.

It was his great hope--and we talked about this; we talked about this at length--to make it into a school, a sort of an annex of all the colleges that were around here where they didn't have-- Like [Nam June] Paik doing video in the curriculum. I mean, all the new ideas. Oh, so my son Jon [Jonathan Brown] said he'd go on the board. We wanted to have a very prestigious board of directors. John Lennon said he would go on the board. Dick Higgins said he would go on the board, and it would look very good. And these things could have been worked up into a kind of annex. George became ill and that was the end of that.

SMITH: So then he bought the farm in 1976--

BROWN: Is that what you find? I have to check it.

SMITH: Yeah.

BROWN: And he died in when?

SMITH: 'Seventy-eight.

BROWN: He died in '78.

SMITH: When did he get ill? Was it shortly before--?

BROWN: He had such a bad medical history. Nobody had a worse one. He had very, very bad asthma, always. Nobody

could smoke near him. He had bad asthma. He was doing the lofts in Soho and somebody-- One electrician that he owed money had the Mafia beat him up and he lost an eye. He was still here, but he went down there to finish some of the work. He commuted a lot. And he lost an eye. If you see any photos of him, you will see an eye patch, which he wore all the time. That was the result of that.

Then he started feeling very, very, very badly, and we got him to a hospital. Oh, he wanted to go to New York to perform. I said, "George, you better stay and get your physical, because if there is anything wrong with you, you'll never get back to New York. Let's do first things first." I went over to the Great Barrington [Massachusetts] hospital with him and he had his tests. And then the diagnosis was made. His doctor called me. Talked to me. Obviously he knew that I knew him very well. He said that he was going to have a very, very unpleasant winter because he had cancer of the liver. He did the surgery on George. George never, you know, never had any real sort of recovery at all. The doctor never sent George a bill--that's what I wanted to tell you-- because of the situation and his health. And so George started renting rooms. He had all this property and he had mortgage payments for it. I ended up calling George "the concierge," which he loved. He grinned. He had a

little room off the main living room where he stayed, and he rented rooms. Oh, then he got married to a girl who was renting there, Billie [Hutching Maciunas]. Did you know about Billie?

SMITH: I knew about Billie. I was going to ask you about her. That seemed to surprise everybody at the time.

BROWN: Oh, boy! He had a friend, Hala, Hala Pietkovich. He liked her. She was not part of Fluxus, but she was a bit clever at designing clothes, that kind of thing. Hala suggested to him that he marry Billie. She told me that the only reason he agreed was that Billie would then collect his social security. I think he was letting Billie live there just because she needed a place. And he brought her over several times. Then one day he called me. He said, "Jean, I'm getting married. Will you be a witness?" Well, at that point, you wouldn't refuse him anything, you know. It just wouldn't be proper. So I was a witness. They went over to the courthouse in Lee [Massachusetts] and they got married. I wanted to give them a reception, but he said, "Jean, I just couldn't sit through anything." So they came here. I had the music going when we got in, and I made a funny little wedding cake and we had a kind of reception. He was very happy that day, as a matter of fact. I had a few people that he had met in the area and that he liked, so they were

present. Billie stayed on-- Well, then everyone was going to try to cure him, find a cure for cancer of the liver, which has-- That's just exactly what Leonard [Brown] had. Ay-O, one of the Fluxus artists, had heard that it had been surgically successfully done in Japan, so there was that possibility. Then someone else told him about a place in Jamaica that had a sanatorium of some kind that had had good success. He went there. He left Billie behind. He went there with his mother [Leokadia Maciunas]. No luck at all there. He just became more and more ill. And the big living room, the very large wood-paneled living room-- He would lie on a mattress on the floor. That's where he stayed.

I would go over to see him as often as I should, you know. I would just pull up a chair and sit next to him, by him, as he was on the mattress. One day he said something so beautiful to me. I'd sit there. I wouldn't say anything. I'd let him introduce whatever we were going to talk about. And he said, "Jean, do you know--" He says to me, "I'm not afraid to die because--" I can't think of his name. Palestrina? No. Maybe it was. Composed thirteen operas in his lifetime, only three of which have been found. He said, "So maybe the other ten are where I'm going." Well, of course, you know, that just-- But that's the way George was: "I'm not afraid to

die." Introduced it. As I said, I would just sit there very quietly and let him find things to discuss if he needed to. And I'm not sure it was Palestrina. I think it might have been somebody else.

SMITH: Pergolesi perhaps?

BROWN: No. I'll think of it. I will think of it, but I can't at the moment. [Monteverdi] Well, that's later.

But then we were going to have a school. See, the library would be here, and then all the class work would be in his place, which would have been admirably suited, actually, for that kind of thing. And then I thought the school would be an annex-- There are a lot of colleges in this area, and maybe they would hitch on and use its curriculum for their students, because they would never have provided that kind of curriculum. And did I tell you just this minute--? I was so busy thinking of the composer. Did I tell you that John Lennon was going to be on the board and my Jon and Dick Higgins? Yes, I just said that of course, and it was going to be, you know, really set up. I don't know how much of an administrator George would have been, but I think it would have been worth a shot in any case. And it never came to be.

Then Billie stayed on there. She had no place else to go. Living there all alone. One day she called me. She said the telephone was out. It was a very stormy

winter, and the lights were out. The heat was off, too. I guess they didn't pay the fuel oil bill. I said, "Billie, it's time for you to leave." I said, "Come on over here." I had no great affection for Billie. I would never have told George to marry her, but then it wasn't any of my business either. But no great affection. So she stayed here for a lot of days. And then, of course, it was interruptive of my work. So I found her a farmhouse in town where she could then stay and come back to do whatever she needed to do, and she did it.

George had the wedding here. He had three weddings. One with his family and his sister Nijole. In Westchester [New York], I think, is where she lived. Then he had a little Fluxus wedding at-- Whose loft? It would be John Dupre's loft. He was dressed in drag. He had his sister's wedding gown on. Billie was wearing a tuxedo. This was a strange phenomenon of George later. He liked to dress up and wear a wig. High high-heeled shoes and evening dress, very extreme, you know, low-cut evening gowns. Again, none of my business. But I once asked him why he did it, and he said, "Because women have always been very, very kind to me." He'd told me his father was cruel. The only kindness he ever had was from women, so he desired to be one. But okay. Duchamp changed his sex, too. Belle Haleine, do you remember, Rrose Sélavy. He

did exactly that. I have photographs of him dressed as a woman. And then I sort of think of it as wanting to experience the whole gamut of life itself, you know, try everything. But at the end it was-- He came here one New Year's Eve dressed in a bright red evening dress, and I think that was probably when I asked him why. That was his answer. So I accepted it. I mean, I think he was perfectly truthful with me. But then I thought of Duchamp having done the same thing. Curious.

So the school never came to be. And the place was left. He always called Bob Watts his partner. They owned buildings in Soho together. George did the work. They would sell them. Turned out that Billie--

Oh, and then I wanted to tell you one other thing. After-- No, was it his New York wedding? He went down to [Memorial] Sloan-Kettering [Cancer Center]. Somebody got him an appointment, and I think it might have been connected with Susan Sontag, who had her bout of cancer. But I think somehow that was arranged, perhaps through her. And they told him how long he had to live. The next day he came back and he said, "Jean, I want you to have all my documentation." Billie was here. And I couldn't take it because I thought it was his last will and testament, you know, that he knew. When he told me about it I said, "George, I don't want it." I thought that was

the kindest way of telling him not to be so hopeless. I didn't want to get involved in his hopelessness. I just couldn't.

But it turns out that I really wanted it, because it would have enhanced the archive a great deal. So the next day, realizing that I had been in error, I went to see Billie and told her I meant it when I wouldn't take it, but if it would become hers, then I would purchase it from her. She didn't have a button anyway. But obviously she was-- I don't know how she felt about me. I wasn't very taken with her. I don't know how she felt about me. Maybe a little resentful, because we were very, very good friends, George and I, and I don't know what she did.

SMITH: Was her relationship with George romantic? I mean, was there a romantic element to it?

BROWN: Well, Hala told me that what finally convinced him to marry her was that she would get social security. He must have had some feeling for her. And when I asked-- Well, I told you, when I asked him why he went in drag-- That was really kind of strange. He loved it. What was the question you asked me?

SMITH: Well, was it a romantic relationship?

BROWN: I don't know. I couldn't tell you. He was much too sick to have gotten married. If he had asked me, I would have told him not to, but he didn't ask me and it

was not my affair. He liked making her up. I thought she had a great potential for looks, and he used to enjoy making her up and taking her out. And we were invited out at that point. I would go places, because I hadn't been ill. I was fine. And I would at the beginning always say, "Would you like to include Billie? Because if you would, she's invited." And he always responded very positively to that. He sounded as if that pleased him. I don't know. I never discussed it with him. I'll give him that. It just wasn't the kind of question one asks, I think.

SMITH: Well, no.

BROWN: None of my business.

SMITH: Let's see. It seems that you met George in 1973.

BROWN: Did I?

SMITH: Well, I'm asking, because that's what I'm deducing from looking at your papers.

BROWN: I can check it. He moved up here maybe in '73, or did I meet him? I don't remember.

SMITH: You met him in New York. You had mentioned yesterday that you had received anonymous packages which you then later figured-- Or at the time did you think it was George?

BROWN: No. I didn't know. I had no idea. Because I had so much going on I never stopped to think back.

SMITH: You had not met him while Leonard was alive.

BROWN: No.

SMITH: So in terms of your dada interests, you had not run across him, to your knowledge.

BROWN: No. He was something else entirely. After I was finished, I got as much of the dada material as I could get. It might come up at auction, but the prices I certainly could not afford. I told you I laid all the books out on the floor, made my guidelines, my formula for what it would all become. No, we did not know George. I went to see him, I told you-- "Dingdong" on the doorbell. He came out, and I said, "I'm Jean Brown. I want everything of Fluxus." And he opened the door and greeted me as someone he had always known.

SMITH: Is this the place where he had the guillotine blades on the door?

BROWN: You know all about those.

SMITH: Well, I've read about those.

BROWN: That was some looking door. Of course, he got involved with the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation].

SMITH: Or the [New York] State Bureau of Investigation. Had something to do with the Fluxhouses.

BROWN: Housing. Yes. Living space, actually.

SMITH: When you went to see him, had you heard anything about him? I mean, what was the reputation that preceded

him? What were the impressions that--?

BROWN: Well, it was an underground movement, not very well known at all. George kept it alive. George was an architect. George also worked for-- What's the name of the company, the furniture company that does the Mies van der Rohe chairs?

SMITH: Well, we can find that out.

BROWN: Yeah, that's easy. [Knoll Furniture] He worked, and every cent he got he spent it on Fluxus. His mother was furious with him, because he squandered his money as far as she was concerned, but every button he had went to Fluxus. He must have had an enormous commitment, which wasn't visible, you know, but really deep down I think he believed in it utterly. That was his choice, his way to express himself and get all the other artists to join him.

He had a run-in with the zoning board, I think. None of these buildings were zoned for dwellings. They were factory buildings, really. George was sort of Marxist in his thinking, I think. Strongly, maybe even. Not communist, but Marxist. And he first had the idea of converting these buildings into low-cost housing for people who couldn't afford to live in what was going to be housing. He didn't get very far with that, but then he decided he'd turn the interior space into lofts, which he did and sold. The other day I found a drawing that I

had--I didn't know I had it--of the outline of buildings that he was doing and the cost of them. I'll show it to you. I did not know I had it, and I don't even know where it was. And it seemed to me that-- Well, the Getty [Center for the History of Art and the Humanities] thing is strange in that it was to be everything that wasn't on the wall in frames, and I gave lots of stuff to him because I wanted it there. But somehow this didn't get there, and I'll show it to you. I came across it the other day when I was hunting up stuff for Julie [Lazar].

SMITH: The two of you just hit it off right away?

BROWN: I told you. I came to the door and I said, "I'm Jean Brown and I want everything of Fluxus." And he was almost as if he were expecting me, really. I told you, he would do the fabrication of all of these things. He'd do a bunch of them. I would go and pick it up. Sometimes the boys [Jonathan Brown and Robert Brown] would pick it up. If he had something ready, I'd hear from him. And if it was convenient for them and they were coming up here, they'd do it. He told me I had everything of Fluxus, but I know I didn't. He forgot.

SMITH: Was this after you'd been working with Ken Friedman?

BROWN: Before.

SMITH: Before, even. Was he the one who connected you

with Ken Friedman?

BROWN: I think you might find it in the files at the Getty, but I have a funny feeling that [Hans] Sohm did it.

SMITH: Hans Sohm.

BROWN: Yes. That impression stays with me. Because I did not seek out Ken Friedman--he wrote to me. And that letter would be in the files, and it would also mention who recommended that he write me.

SMITH: Okay, I didn't see that.

BROWN: I think it has to be there.

SMITH: But, at any rate, in terms of Maciunas, he became eventually the person that you really relied upon to get Fluxus materials.

BROWN: Yes. George never went to museums. George never went to galleries. He was just always busy working on Fluxus. And one day he said, "You know, I'd like to see your dada/Fluxus collection." Well, he didn't go out very much. Even though he said it, it struck me that it was really not the kind of thing that he would go out for. So then I got the idea. I said, "Why don't you build me an installation, a storage installation for my Fluxus things." And he designed this upstairs.

SMITH: Was that the first time he came out to Lee, then?

BROWN: That was his first visit. He designed that. I had local people execute it. And why did he come again?

Oh, he came-- He had such a wonderful time--the letter's in the file--he asked if he could bring his mother with him next time. Did you come across that?

SMITH: Yes.

BROWN: Well, it was fine with me. She came and she stayed a week. I just think he liked it more and more and more and then decided to buy a place up here if he could find one.

SMITH: You were mentioning last night that the two of you would just sit together and think of ideas for your projects.

BROWN: That was how we spent some of our time. He came about every day with his little tool kit to see that everything was in order upstairs, and if it wasn't in order he would correct it. I think he had a real attachment to the collection. As I told you, he had such a crazy life. This represented a certain kind of stability to him which I think he was ready for. He was a wild man before. People tell me of his trips to Europe, where he did Fluxus performances, and it's incredible. The car would break down, they wouldn't get there in time. I don't know. It was just horrendous, the life there. He never told me, but all the others did. Once he took his mother. His mother was very nice. The first time I ever met her she was at 80 Wooster Street [Manhattan], sitting

there. I thought it might be his wife. She looked young enough to be. And I liked her. He wasn't very nice to her then, but she told me how much he adored her when he was growing up. Then Emmett Williams got his mother's impression of it. I asked him to do it, and she did it in Russian. To make it viable for anybody else, it had to be translated. I got somebody to do the translation, and that's it. I don't know whether you've seen it or not.

SMITH: Yes, I saw it.

BROWN: And they're all true, by the way. A lot of people think it's a Fluxus thing, but it's all true.

SMITH: I didn't see any translation. I just saw the letter that she wrote, which I think is in Lithuanian, actually.

BROWN: Maybe. She was a ballet dancer. She worked for--I can't remember his name, one of the high commissioners. He was Russian, I think. We'll see her anyway. I had it translated. I mailed it out to everybody, because I felt, again, that was something that should be in the public domain. Anybody who knew George might want it.

SMITH: This was after he died.

BROWN: I can't remember. Must have been. But maybe it will come back to me. That was a kind of frenetic period in my life. I was losing, you know, a very good friend. I remember calling Bobby [Robert Brown] and saying,

"Bobby, George has died and I would like his obituary in the New York Times, because I think he deserves to be there." And Bob got it in. It appeared. And there was a big funeral. I didn't go to any of it. I couldn't. La Monte Young-- A real Fluxus ceremony. I didn't go. I did go to his Fluxus wedding, though. But I didn't want to go. I didn't like being there, because it was bizarre enough, you know, the whole situation. I knew what was going to happen to him. I didn't particularly care to see him in his sister's wedding dress. You know, it was just of no great interest to me. Although if he needed me, I'd have been there. It didn't matter at all. It was a big bash. He loved it, sick as he was. His mother hated Fluxus because he was spending all his money on it. He worked very, very hard to do his Fluxus business. That was the most important thing in his life, and I guess his contact with those people-- He loved them all. Then he came over here one night-- This was when he was still quite well. He had had a Ginger Island project. He brought the films. It had been filmed on a movie camera. He went with-- Oh, dear me, I don't remember who was in the party. Several people. They were going to buy an island, a Fluxus island.

SMITH: Was this on the Caribbean or--?

BROWN: Somewhere. Ginger Island.

SMITH: I don't know where it is. [the Caribbean]

BROWN: I don't know whether it's even on a map. And what happened was that there were trees on the island which dripped sap all night which made them all violently ill. Now, who was with him on that? I don't know. The Silvermans [Gilbert and Lila] may even have the Ginger Island project. I don't think I ever had it. Then another big idea of George's was to buy a discard of an army property. I think I wrote it down here because I wanted to tell you about it so you would know what wild ideas this guy had. These are the things I wanted to talk about today. The school I told you about. He wanted to buy a mine sweeper.

SMITH: A mine sweeper?

BROWN: And go on an around-the-world cruise for eight years.

SMITH: Oh, a naval mine sweeper.

BROWN: A ship of some sort. He asked me if I'd like to come. But he only wanted people who had skills that might be necessary. It was going to take eight years. Why was it going to take eight years? Because he wanted to visit every medieval monastery extant. And I used to tease him and I said, "Well, I can cook, George." He said, "Everybody can cook." That was no great skill. He needed doctors, dentists. That's what he was looking for. So

one day I said, "Oh, George, I think I've made myself eligible." I said, "I've learned how to walk on water. Will you include me?" See, he said everybody could cook; that wasn't important enough. Obviously everybody could cook. Now, somewhere in the papers at the Getty is the itinerary of that eight-year thing. I know I have it. I know he gave it to me. Did you also know that he also went to my son Jonathan's Institute of Fine Arts [New York University]? Has anyone mentioned that to you?

SMITH: No.

BROWN: He went there for eight years.

SMITH: As a student?

BROWN: He was a medievalist. I'll think of it. I'll think of it, but I can't right now. He studied there for eight years until his professor died, and then somebody said, "Well, maybe it's just time you quit." He was the greatest chartist in the world, too. Charting is one of the things that made me feel he could really be a great success fiscally. He started with charts of ancient Greece and in pen and ink did his chart of all right up to the present, right up to-- And I have that one, the Fluxus one, that long row.

BROWN: He did them in pen and ink. I only saw details of them. I never saw all of them. He collated the poets, the philosophers. That had never been done before. This

was all charted very clearly on charts.

SMITH: Is that preserved somehow?

BROWN: I only saw details of it. I never saw all of it. I don't know what happened to it. I have no notion. Up to the Fluxus, and that's a Fluxus chart that he did. He would do the poets, the philosophers, the dramatists. Nobody had grouped them in that fashion. He went right smack up to the present. I thought that was about the most fiscally viable thing that he had done, because I thought every schoolroom would love to have them. That chart, his Fluxus chart, was the most popular thing in the whole archive. People would come to see if they were on it or to get information that they required. It was my best working tool. Everybody loved it. Maybe you can pull it out at some point and look at it. He told me how to read it best. I said, "George, where are the Fluxus events." He showed me. This was while he was very ill. I wanted to know where the best available Fluxus portion of the chart was, and he told me exactly. But he loved doing that. He had enormous expertise. They were just absolutely great.

Siberian migrations is what he studied at the Institute for eleven years until his professor died and somebody suggested that maybe it was time he left. He had this great, great store of knowledge about all these

things. George was really I think a genius of sorts. I kid my kids and tell them-- They don't like to hear it, I don't think. I tell them he's the only real genius I've ever known. But he was incredible.

SMITH: His reputation sounds like he was a very difficult person to get along with, and you two just hit it off right away.

BROWN: I don't know that he was that difficult. He was more fascinating than difficult, I'll tell you that. And look at these projects, Ginger Island, the mine sweeper. But I think the charts as a text-- Kids don't like to read, but if you can look it all up on a chart, it would be very, very useful, and I don't know why it hasn't been done. But George had done it. And that was where I thought he could make a fortune, just selling these to schools. And I would have helped him as much as I could. But he was a genius, and he knew everything.

SMITH: Did you commission work from him?

BROWN: I told him I wanted everything of Fluxus, including his own contributions to the movement. You will see them there at the Getty.

SMITH: So he would then call up Bob Watts and say, "Jean Brown wants some boxes. Tell me what I should make for her"?

BROWN: I'm sure. I don't know how he did it, but that

sounds just about the way. And then he brought The Raining Window up. Everybody loves that now. It was in my window for two weeks. It was $1,000, which was a lot of money for me. Why did I turn it down? Because $1,000 was one reason. It wasn't archival enough material. It was like Joseph Beuys Felt Suit, you know? The Felt Suit, it was Helene [Verin Ripps]'s last name. I was offered that from René Block for $95. Helene informs me that-- I read somewhere that it sold for $45,000. No, she said even more, $75,000.

SMITH: There was a letter to George that you wrote about The Raining Window where you said you didn't want the archive to develop a fun house look. You wanted to maintain the shape of it.

BROWN: I remember saying that. Was that my justification?

SMITH: No, it wasn't a justification. It was just part of-- I think your only justification was that you weren't sure that you liked The Raining Window.

BROWN: I'm sure I must have said that, but everybody else does, so I now consider it a missed opportunity just for that reason. How much is it now? I have no idea. I was very anxious to help him in every way I could to get up enough cash for this medieval village.

You never met Bob's Susan, but you will. Susan was

the-- Nobody knew what I was doing. Everybody, I think, thought I was pretty crazy, because Fluxus was very strange at that time. And Susan was the first person who came up here, looked at it all, and said, "Jean, I love it. I want one of everything you have." Well, I was so elated. Approval from someone. This helped George. He made her a drawer, a cabinet with-- Was it five drawers? Each one by a different artist. He had a Paik drawer, an Ay-O drawer. I don't remember who the five people were. It was done very lovingly. Because I told George that I considered Susan a member of my family and I wanted her treated that way, and he made this marvelous thing, marvelous object, the cabinet. And then Susan needed money and she sold it to Silverman. I think it's one of the best things that emerged from George's efforts in Fluxus. I should have bought it, but I didn't have enough money then.

SMITH: The price had gone up.

BROWN: Way, way up. Fluxus is-- Well, Susan knows prices, I don't know them.

SMITH: What was her--? What did she do?

BROWN: She's Bob [Robert Brown]'s partner in the gallery [Reinhold-Brown Gallery] and his lady. And she just went for it.

SMITH: What's her last name?

BROWN: Reinhold.

SMITH: So she knows the art business real well.

BROWN: She's very good at it, too, I must say. I approve of her very, very much. We share similar interests, which always creates an enormous bond, as you well know.

SMITH: Did you think you could help George and Fluxus by getting--? At one point he was thinking of trying to develop prototype lists that he could send to museums and--

BROWN: That I don't know.

SMITH: He was writing about it in a letter to you to try to start marketing Fluxus materials.

BROWN: Was it the chart?

SMITH: Well, no, it seems like he wanted actually the objects, the boxes, the artists' books.

BROWN: I don't remember that.

SMITH: No, you don't. Okay.

BROWN: No. I would have done anything, anything I could think of. And maybe it was one of the things I thought of, actually. I have to tell you one other funny story. My kids couldn't figure George out, although he was pretty unfathomable anyway. Okay, it was Easter. I don't remember the year. Jon was coming up with his family. I had invited George. George was very excited. Jon was then the director of the Institute, and George was going

to meet the director of his Institute that he had gone to for eleven years. So he came in, and I introduced him to Jon. They shook hands, and George's opening gambit was, "Do you know how many of the nails of the true cross have been found in Europe?" One hundred and twenty-four I think was the figure that he used, which I thought was just such a marvelous thing, an original way of presenting himself to Jon. Jon didn't-- Well, I shouldn't-- Jon wasn't as excited about it--

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BROWN: Then when Jon had his-- I always tried to give him something really commemorative if he had an exhibition. It was a gift. And he was having his Murillo exhibition and George made him a box, a Murillo box which was just great. Jon did love that, does love it. Very happy to have it.

SMITH: What's in the box?

BROWN: Everything that was not about Murillo. Everything that was just being discovered and used in Murillo's era. The three-tine fork was invented. All the artifacts that were invented at the time of Murillo. He researched the whole thing, and that contained objects of the period of Murillo plus a secret drawer. That was a great thing that George loved was secret drawers. You know, even the doorway with a metal--

SMITH: So he found a seventeenth-century three-tine fork, an antique?

BROWN: I wish I could remember what else was in it. I commissioned it. George made it. Well, Jonathan would supply that if we needed it. I don't know how--

SMITH: You commissioned it.

BROWN: Yes, of course.

SMITH: How much did you pay him for it?

BROWN: You know, these days my figures are difficult for me, but I think $150 for it, and it's a treasure. But I'd bring people over to George's. He'd sell one thing or another. He charged them two and three dollars. He had no sense of-- No business sense, I guess I would call it. He just let people have things.

SMITH: Because they would enjoy it?

BROWN: Because he didn't evaluate them really, I think. I brought somebody there, just somebody very casually to meet him, and whoever it was wanted something. He charged something like two or three dollars. He didn't know how to price these things. I may have upstairs-- Because I had duplicates and triplicates of some of the Fluxus newspapers. I may have something that lists the prices of a Fluxobject. In any case, the Getty has it. There was one newspaper, VTRE-- You came across VTRE. That was it. And there was one that was on the Fluxshop and all the prices are listed. It's ludicrous, the prices he was asking. Then, that was a time when art was not a consumer object. You'd have to have a special feeling about these things to buy them at all, because they are strange, aren't they, these little artifacts.

SMITH: Well, they hadn't peaked, because other kinds of art were certainly consumer objects.

BROWN: Yes. This was way, way, way in advance. Like the dada stuff I used to pick off the shelves in Paris. Jon and I figured out once that there's probably an institutional lag of fifty years before things get admitted. That does not apply any longer, though. Well, because the whole market has changed.

SMITH: There is something I noticed that was in the letter to you he sent in '76, that he was afraid that the days of collaborative projects were over.

BROWN: That's right. That's what has come to pass. You know, I told this to Jon. I can't remember whether I told you or not. I could not have done the archive in these times, at the present. I couldn't do it.

SMITH: How come?

BROWN: Because there are no more movements. There are no more group activities. Everybody's on his own for himself. There isn't one school, there isn't one movement, like the Bauhaus, like futurism. They're all obsolete. It may revive in some way at some future point, but right now, nothing. It's kind of an every man for himself.

SMITH: Did George share your enthusiasm for Duchamp?

BROWN: Oh, yes. Yes. It would be fun for you to look at that chart, I think, and see how he organized it. John Cage, he really adored John Cage. Oh, when we were

talking about the school, he went to see John Cage with Bob Watts. Bob told me John Cage treated George so respectfully and tried to make him feel as much at ease and as comfortable as he could. But George was in awe, very much. I don't think he was relaxed. There's nobody easier than John Cage to be with, but he held him in awe, is the word.

SMITH: In awe. This is kind of a difficult question, but I'm wondering what kind of-- Did he consider himself to be a good artist? Did he have a high valuation of his own talents?

BROWN: He was just a fabricator of Fluxus. And he hoped to have good Flux ideas to make Fluxobjects. No. I never saw that he had very much ego. Never thought about himself, I would say. Actually, I don't know what impression you're forming of me, but I think that was a big link, because I never thought that anything I was doing was very important. I do tell you, I would have done it in any event, because it was-- I still owe it more. My survival really depended on it. I found this thing and I loved it, and that was extremely important at that time in my life. No, he never thought of himself as very much, that I could observe, anyway.

SMITH: Did he introduce you to people in his--?

BROWN: He'd have all these Fluxus things, and I would go

down. One was a games thing.

SMITH: Oh, the Fluxgames. Fluxfest, yeah.

BROWN: Then a costume party. Well, you know, I knew them all. And they were just as eager to know me. I was a potential collector, so they were very happy with me, as I was with them.

SMITH: For instance, that photo that you have of Maciunas and John Lennon and Yoko Ono-- Were you at that event?

BROWN: That was when John and Yoko came up here with Sean [Lennon]. They spent a day here with a nanny and with a chauffeur. George brought them over in the morning. We spent the whole day here one way or another. Then on the way to Stockbridge [Massachusetts]-- There was this little shop in Stockbridge where you could dress up in those clothes and be photographed, and that was when it was done.

SMITH: Well, nineteenth-century clothes, right?

BROWN: Yeah. Period stuff. I think it's very good. I told you it was the only smile-- People tell me it's the only smiling picture of John they've ever seen. He never smiled. It's a fun thing. And Yoko came down. George took Yoko and John upstairs. I didn't go up. Yoko came down and I asked her if she was interested in the project of the school, and she said yes. And then John came down and I asked him, and he said yes. But obviously they

weren't really meaning it. Some people followed them on the street, and John never wanted to be recognized. He was through. He told me how traumatic each appearance was that he made, public appearance.

SMITH: Just going out on the street.

BROWN: No, no, no, performing.

SMITH: Performing, oh.

BROWN: Yes. He just hated it. And then he did say to me then they'd wheel all the people with wheelchairs up into the first row, and he didn't enjoy having that happen. The whole thing was very strange, as we know. You know what those big pop concerts were about. John didn't like it at all.

SMITH: I wanted to ask you a little bit about the New Year's parties that you participated in.

BROWN: George would stage-- He'd call them a Fluxevent. I'm really not a groupie kind of person, actually. I don't think I ever let go at any of those things.

SMITH: Were they small events, or were there lots of people?

BROWN: Lots of people. But Fluxus people, mainly. I don't remember that there were any non-Fluxus. There were some who might even have been on the periphery of Fluxus, but they would be there. They were pretty well attended, I think.

SMITH: So a couple of hundred people?

BROWN: Seventy-five, fifty in his loft at 80 Wooster Street. He had a basement loft which he had transformed into beautiful space. It had a funny little-- Well, it could have been a courtyard, but it wasn't. Because some of those buildings had courtyards. But there was an exterior space. He had paved it beautifully. He had planted a tree. And then he planted one in front of 80 Wooster Street. I think those were the only two trees in Soho. But he landscaped it. And that's where most of these events were held. The Cinemathèque was upstairs, Jonas [Mekas]'s place. Both Lithuanian. George, I think, thought of Jonas as his best friend. I think there was some kind of an estrangement, but then a great reconciliation before George died. Jonas came up often and was very warm. But then there had been this estrangement also, which I think was painful to George. George had learned very, very, very well how to conceal his emotions just so one would wonder if he had any. That kind of concealment. Always told me how he felt if I asked him, but then, you know, I didn't ask him very much. That wasn't the real basis for our relationship.

SMITH: Did he open up with you, or was he the same--?

BROWN: Well, I just feel he liked me. I could tell he liked me. And of course he would tell other people, so I

would hear it. But it was a pretty undemonstrative kind of relationship. Even though I tell it the way I do-- I thought it was kind of strange, but I treasured it. I thought the relationship was kind of strange

SMITH: You mean between you and him.

BROWN: But I treasured it because I don't know how I would have fared at that point. I don't know how he would have either, though. There was mutual regard.

SMITH: You said last night all of your friends are young people. Is that when that began, after Leonard died and you threw yourself into the archive?

BROWN: I met mostly young people. The people who came here were young. This collection would have had absolutely no appeal to anybody older, who would have already had exposure to whatever they wanted. I don't think there was anybody--

SMITH: What about somebody like Robert Motherwell, who was a dada/surrealist?

BROWN: Well, I talked to him a few times, but I didn't see him. He was given a gold medal at the same time that my Jonathan was. His wife came for it. He was too ill. [Joan] Mirò's daughter came. Mirò got one too. Motherwell was just wonderful, I think, to have introduced us to dada. And that book [The Dada Painters and Poets] is fantastic, because each one of the members that was

surviving wrote his own portion of it.

SMITH: I noticed that-- I think it was the January 1, '75, New Year's party you had to bring a green dinner. I was wondering what you made. Everybody had to make a dinner--

BROWN: The natural color of a dish using, well, no repetition of it.

SMITH: No repetition and you couldn't use food coloring?

BROWN: I used green. I took avocados and did those. What do you make? Guacamole. Eggplant, avocado. Somebody else just asked me that, and I don't remember. I remember those two things. But they were all green, the green that nature produces. George made something colorless.

SMITH: Colorless?

BROWN: He distilled the color out of it so it was clear. Some chemical change. I've forgotten what it was. Geoff Hendricks made mashed potatoes. His color was blue. A lot was not real, you see. He had to use artificial coloring. And blue food would be difficult, wouldn't it?

SMITH: It would be pretty hard, yeah.

BROWN: I had avocado, eggplant, three or four things. I don't remember what they were.

SMITH: Did George try to get you involved in making Fluxobjects?

BROWN: I showed no interest. I told you I wanted to be known only as a collector. Because I was not an artist, and I didn't want any confusion about it.

SMITH: But everybody's an artist, right?

BROWN: You see, Helene could be a Fluxus artist. That's her turn of mind.

SMITH: Well, I mean, what makes her, Helene Verin, who's too young to have participated in Fluxus--?

BROWN: And probably didn't even know about it because she was too young.

SMITH: But what makes her work Fluxus in your estimation?

BROWN: That wanting to print sheets. George would have liked that. Designing sneakers. He would have liked that. He would have liked utilitarian objects, too. That carpet is typically Fluxus. I spent several days--

SMITH: Oh, that carpet that's designed to be--

BROWN: Like a floor.

SMITH: A hardwood floor.

BROWN: Floor boards. Very Fluxus. Quintessential Fluxus, I think. He tried to interest me in buying a rug for upstairs in the sitting room which would consist of footprints. The footprints would be woven into the rug. And if I said that I didn't want it to look like a game room-- I discouraged a lot of that. It was actually a study collection. People were coming all the time. I

didn't want them to be confused about it. This was going to be that.

SMITH: It was not a museum.

BROWN: Not at all. It was just a-- I suppose a library would be the nearest thing to have called it.

SMITH: Of course it would have been quite delightful in the same community that has the Norman Rockwell Museum to have the George Maciunas Museum.

BROWN: I don't know why that play part didn't appeal to me. I can't tell you. As I think back now, I should have accepted every bit of it. The ceiling upstairs, there's a board that was all strung with George's things that he had brought. The greatest thing of all-- The arrangement I made with the Getty was that everything that was not on the walls-- But he had done a clock that just spun around. Well, you can see it there. I love that clock. Each one of us has our own interior mechanism, time mechanism. Some people are early, some people are late, and we all do it--there are variances of it. And this just spun around. It included everybody's personal time mechanism. It was really the best thing I have, I thought. Then I have Man Ray's lamp shade which he stuck up on the ceiling. A Duchamp rotorelief that would spin around. He wanted to use an original; I wouldn't allow it. Because I had a very special set of the rotoreliefs that Duchamp had

signed. It was probably the only signed set. Arturo Schwarz had Duchamp sign it for me. So he made a replica of it and worked a mile a minute. The lamp shade. The rotorelief.

SMITH: Now, when you bought the Duchamp material from Arturo Schwarz, was that before you had actually met Duchamp personally?

BROWN: My first encounter, I told you, was because I wanted him to do the jacket design for a catalog that I was going to do for Leonard. And that was pretty late in Duchamp's--

SMITH: You hadn't asked Schwarz, for example, to help you--?

BROWN: He got all those catalogs. They were very expensive. I could not ask him. I couldn't have afforded them. So I never did.

SMITH: Getting back to Maciunas, it sounds like he proposed a lot of things that you didn't go along with. You had a pretty clear idea, then, of what you were going to do and what you weren't going to do.

BROWN: Obviously if it was a study collection, I should have only had things that were suitable for that. And I remember saying that I didn't want it to turn into a fun house. I could have made it a playroom.

SMITH: Well, it seems from looking at the catalog of the

Silverman collection [Fluxus Etc.: The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Collection] that that's what it is.

BROWN: He's got everything.

SMITH: It is the fun house or the playroom.

BROWN: He has everything. Things that maybe George didn't even remember existed, Silverman just ferreted them out with Jon Hendricks's help. But they got everything.

SMITH: Did Silverman know Maciunas?

BROWN: No. That's a big regret of his, a very big regret. Because unless he's changed his mind recently, he thought the movement ended with the demise of George Maciunas. I remember calling Jon--

SMITH: Jon Hendricks.

BROWN: My Jon.

SMITH: Oh, your Jon, okay.

BROWN: And asking him, "Now George has died, Jon, what do you think? Is Fluxus over? Has it ended?" And he said, "Mother, how long did cubism last? How long did postimpressionism last?" Which was a good basis for comparison. He said, "And I would treat every Fluxus object you have like a master drawing." And that was when we decided that institutions had a fifty-year time lag between what is happening. I don't know that it exists anymore, but at that time he was quite right. I agreed.

I was curious to know how to place these things in time and space. It was just a conjecture I was having at the moment. [tape recorder off]

George had a very, very great interest.

SMITH: So he loved Monteverdi.

BROWN: And what a beautiful thing to have said.

SMITH: Yeah. How did he feel about pop art?

BROWN: He would not have liked it. What happened one day-- He thought that Andy Warhol was a total fake and faker. He didn't like him at all, and a very funny thing happened. My Bob called me one day and told me that somebody he knew wanted to give Andy Warhol I think a Fluxus names box. And I came back and I told George. Well, I think I put him on the phone. And when he came back he was livid. He just hated Andy Warhol. He was a copyist, a cheat, a fraud, everything that one could have said about Andy Warhol. And I said I wouldn't feel that way about him. I said, "I think he perfectly epitomizes our era," which he did in many ways. And he didn't like it. He was livid. He had a real, real-- I would call it a hatred for Andy Warhol.

SMITH: Do you think he felt that Fluxus should have been in the galleries, should have been in the museums?

BROWN: It should have had a very important place. I think he felt that. That it had a real place, and that it

was an important one. He didn't like Yoko. He came with a paper cutter and we were doing a file on Yoko Ono. He kept right on cutting, but he said the most blasphemous things about her and also about Charlotte Moorman. Charlotte had by then done a few avant-garde festivals. I really think that he felt that those should have been done by Fluxus. He would have loved it on a grand scale. He wanted everybody to accept it. So he didn't like Yoko. He did a whole installation for Yoko. I wonder if I have that upstairs. I think I might have had a lot of copies of that. We'll check it out.

He did a whole big installation in Syracuse [New York] at the museum there for Yoko and John. And there were many unpleasant things that happened in connection with it. George said to me, while they were flying all their friends up, he [George] was thumbing his way back to New York. And that was strange. I don't know what the disagreements were about. Obviously he was doing things that they didn't like or want or I don't know which. And when George died--I guess that's at the Getty too--I got a letter from Yoko or Yoko's attorney, I really don't remember, saying that they were forgiving George a debt which he owed them because he had provided so much pleasure for them in his lifetime. Now, why it came to me, I'll never know. But obviously people made a

connection between George and me. It was never-- It was really just about Fluxus and having a good time and fun together, you know. That's all. That's what the whole relationship was. Why it was taken so seriously-- And I was here. He had his whole gang in New York, but I was here. It was very easy for me to reach him. And by then, I think he understood that I would do anything to help him that I could. The letter forgiving his debts I'm sure went in the Yoko Ono file.

SMITH: I remember seeing something along--

BROWN: You really took a look, a good, hard look. I'm not that good at it. I'm much better at forming archives than anything else.

SMITH: Well, I wasn't sure what the significance of it was, but--

BROWN: Neither am I, dear. Why would they have sent it to me? But they knew--

SMITH: What was the relationship to Barbara Moore?

BROWN: Whenever George had anything unpleasant to do, Barbara did it. She was very, very, very good to him. Peter [Moore] took all the photographs. Peter has an archive that to me is worth, well, the largest sum of money that I can think of. He took all of those photographs. They're in his archive, in his photograph archive there, every record of everything that took place.

Very painstakingly, very assiduously went into the--
Barbara, when George ever had anything unpleasant to do he would give the chore to Barbara, who did it. I just didn't get along with Barbara.

SMITH: "Unpleasant," of what sort?

BROWN: We couldn't make it. I used to call her a militant. She treated Peter so badly, and I really loved Peter. But she did do a lot for George. She did everything he asked of her. Anything unpleasant that he didn't want to do himself, Barbara would do.

SMITH: Such as--

BROWN: Errands, all kinds of errands. Barbara could tell you. She was extremely kind to him. I just did not get along with her and still don't see her. I have no desire to see her. She's a very officious lady. Really, that's what I call that type of woman. She has too many male hormones, very dictatorial, and I'm not at all.

SMITH: Well, I guess at the end she wanted to keep the Maciunas papers.

BROWN: She got them, I guess. But then if she kept them, he gave them to her. She started Backworks with Jon Hendricks. That broke up. She's hard to take, I think, for anybody. And I loved her Peter, and he was so charming and so kind and so all accepting, because Barbara was not easy. But she did an awful lot for George. That

was all. She had an enormous affection for him. Less when he was up here, but when he was in New York she did everything that he ever asked her. She played an important role.

SMITH: What was your role in the Maciunas Memorial at Dartmouth [College]?

BROWN: That's a whole other very long story. Do you want to hear it all?

SMITH: Yes, I do.

BROWN: When I lived in Springfield [Massachusetts] with Leonard, somebody brought Jan van der Marck, who was on a grant, a Rockefeller grant from Holland, to study museums in America. Someone brought him to our house in Springfield, a woman I know. I was quite friendly with her. And she brought Jan over. Oh, he had also-- That painting was in the Seattle World's Fair, my general [The General Arturo Schwarz]. Jan's job was to deliver all of the European section of the Seattle World's Fair paintings to Seattle. They were in his custody. Someone brought him to my house, and he started to send me things. Little notices. Things about dada. I was not even in Fluxus then. And he'd send me little-- Which moved me a great deal, because he was taking-- I just met him casually. He was taking extra time and mailing me things that he thought might be of interest. Then when it was time to

take the pictures back to Europe, he called and said he had the responsibility of taking the pictures back, but he wasn't going back until he had a return visa to come back here after he delivered the pictures.

He was married. Before all this, Leonard and I were on a trip to Europe. It was a very big snowstorm. The planes were not flying except one to Belgium. So what's the difference if we go to Holland or to Belgium, you know--we were just off on a holiday. We went to Brussels, and then we went to Amsterdam. And I remembered that Jan had sent me things. I think this is before he took the paintings over. He was working at the Stedelijk [Museum] and he was going to get married. And he took us to meet his fiancée [Ingeborg van der Marck], a fascinating lady. Since has died. She was fifteen years older than Jan. Some people might say she was a lot of fun. I have to say I enjoyed her, but she was very brash. Jan said to me when I was that naive that what I'm telling you next happened-- He said, "She lives in a district where the women sit in the windows." All I could think of was, you know, the way New Englanders rock on their porches and look at the passing scene. But it was the red light district. Very handsome area, because the reflection of the red lights in the canals created a beautiful aura. But the ladies were sitting in the windows. And we went

there and I met her, and they were soon to be married.

Was it then or later that he was going to bring the pictures over to the world's fair? Well, he wasn't going back to Holland or Europe until he had a visa to return. Their weekend visit turned into more than a week. We called everybody we could think of to try to get him his visa. He called everybody he could think of. We were just working on it. My husband was a total gentleman, because the only thing he said about it all was, "Jean, I'm not going to tell you what our telephone bill is this month." That's all he ever said. Something happened, and he got back to this country. I'm a little unclear about the details. I might recall, but at the moment I'm unclear. And he got a job as the director of the modern museum [Museum of Contemporary Art] in Chicago. Then he went on to, I think, the state of Washington. See, all his papers are not here. They're all out there in California. I could just look them up and would have no effort.

I introduced Jan to George. Jan came here with Ingeborg for a weekend. We all had dinner here. The next day Jan and Ingeborg were going over to George's to see what he had. Jan is a very good writer. I tried very hard to have him do a book on Fluxus. Well, he had too many other commitments at the time. But then when George

became so very ill, I called Jan and I said, "You once expressed some interest in doing something about George, and he's not going to be with us very much longer. Could you take it on?" He said, "No, I'm too busy." But he was at Dartmouth, and we started the memorial room. That's how it started.

Barbara Moore has a place in all that saga, but what was it? That's probably why I got really angry. Oh, I know. When I talked to Jan and he said he was too busy and he couldn't do it, he said, "Jean, why don't you get all the tapes you can. Tape him as much as you can." Well, Barbara had known him much, much longer than I, and I told you she was his devoted servant. So I called Barbara. And she was very nasty about it. That's when I really got angry with her. I don't know why she was so nasty about it. But I think maybe I felt because it wasn't her idea-- She just didn't like my having the idea. It couldn't be done. It wasn't possible. And I listened to her, which was a very, very-- But I did become angry with her. That's what the breach was about. Paik came up once to see-- Paik and who else? George said to me, "Paik is coming." He held Paik in high esteem. He said, "What can I do?" I said, "Well, George, you have two choices. You can tell Paik not to come, or he can come and eat here. I'll help you entertain him." Well, that was just

fine. And when I told Paik about the tapes, he went right out, got a tape recorder. He got one tape. That was an error that Barbara made, because there would have been an oral history.

SMITH: I think I saw the transcript of that tape in your--

BROWN: That's the tape that Larry Miller did, a videotape with George. In fact I'm trying to place it in time, in a time spectrum. I think it must have been before Paik came, because I think George was in pretty good health then. It strikes me he was not as ailing as he became later. You know, you'll have to dig it out. But Paik was all for it. It was on a Saturday. Monday morning I went out and bought a tape recorder and George started taping. The one he did was very good. Where is it? At the Getty. It has to be there.

SMITH: Were you able to give George advice or talk to him in a way that other people didn't?

BROWN: We were very good friends, and obviously he accepted advice from me, as I did from him. Giving advice-- I think anybody could have given George advice. He may have been short-tempered at times, but I never found him difficult really. You have a feeling that he is?

SMITH: Well, that seems to be what--

BROWN: A consensus.

SMITH: A consensus that he was a very difficult person and that was one of the problems that Fluxus had.

BROWN: He had a rift with-- I know he did with Dick [Higgins]. That's how the Something Else Press started. You know that story?

SMITH: No.

BROWN: Dick had given George something to have published, I don't know why. Dick will know. He'll tell you, because actually it was Dick who told me this. And so he went down to George-- I think they were neighbors. And George was not going to be very cooperative. Dick went upstairs and mentioned to Alison [Knowles]-- He said, "I'm going to do it myself. I'm going to start my own press and call it the Shirtsleeve Press." And Alison looked at him. She said, "Well, okay. Print it yourself, but I would call it something else." So the press came to be called the Something Else Press.

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SMITH: Did you have a sense of when the collection would be finished? Did you have a goal in your mind that would let you say, "Yes, I've achieved what I want to achieve. I don't need to build it anymore"?

BROWN: Well, one actually can comprehend the enormous responsibility. In a frame house I couldn't even get insurance. I had the burden of it and the knowledge of what could occur. Would I have stopped? I think I would have gone on. But it would have required more effort, perhaps, than I could have given it. Then one day Bob was up--

SMITH: Bob, your son Bob.

BROWN: My Bob. Obviously I'd gotten the impression that neither boy wanted it. I would have kept it for the boys [Robert Brown and Jonathan Brown], but something they said indicated that it was not a major interest to them. They would rather have had the proceeds than the material. I think I was right, because I think they agree. And when it was time to sell it, I said, "You guys will have to come up and help me." It was very unwieldy, you know, unlisted, uncataloged. I said, "You'll just have to come up and help me." And I said, "And if I sell it, each one

will get a third." And that was the way I did it. This was a very kind way, I think, because they needed the proceeds then. I don't know whether they would have needed it more if I had waited, but they needed it then. That was enough for me.

SMITH: You had mentioned yesterday that you sat on the [Mount] Holyoke [College] Art Museum board. And then this morning you mentioned Smith [College].

BROWN: And Amherst [College].

SMITH: And Amherst.

BROWN: That was all from Springfield [Massachusetts].

SMITH: So that was when you were living in Springfield in the sixties?

BROWN: Probably.

SMITH: How did you get involved on those boards?

BROWN: I think there were things that they wanted to borrow.

SMITH: Oh, from your personal collection.

BROWN: And I lent them works of art. That's all they were interested in. I let them borrow them.

SMITH: Did Leonard [Brown] sit on boards as well?

BROWN: No.

SMITH: Well, you also mentioned that one of the reasons you joined the boards is because it allowed you to help young people.

BROWN: I got artists jobs. Because that's the way it's done, really. They don't have search committees. They just ask you if you know somebody. It's as simple as that. If you know someone who can slide right in and do the job, that person gets the job.

SMITH: Who were the people that you helped?

BROWN: Adja Junkers. Do you know that name?

SMITH: No.

BROWN: I have to think through.

SMITH: These are people that you knew before you were involved with Fluxus, I take it.

BROWN: You know, if anyone needed a job and I knew of it and I was asked, I would recommend that person. I have to think of the others.

SMITH: When you were involved in these museum boards, did you get involved in acquisitions, museum acquisitions? Exhibition planning?

BROWN: No, the directors did all that. I think I have somewhere on there a letter from Amherst College. This is from Amherst. This is the guy who was chairman of the committee. Can you read it?

SMITH: "Many thanks for your valued participation. You are an inspiration for us all. Warmly, William W. Collins."

BROWN: He was the chairman of the Amherst College [Mead

Art] Museum board. That's about what I did. I presented myself.

SMITH: Did you volunteer for these boards?

BROWN: No. I was asked to be on them. I was invited on them, and then of course my ulterior motive was to get jobs for people that I knew were very well qualified who needed jobs. This was a service kind of attitude that I had toward artists.

SMITH: To help young artists in particular?

BROWN: I don't know whether you're getting the sense, but I like doing things for people. That's when I feel my best, strangely enough. We kid now with Jon and Bob that I don't have a great sense of self-esteem, but I would get it from doing that kind of thing.

SMITH: Did that affect how you built the archives? Sometimes you'd buy things because you were helping people?

BROWN: Well, no. Maybe I did. I did some. I tried always to buy and contact people whose interests coincided with the archive. I didn't try to do beyond that except for the-- And I didn't like those committees. Well, because I have no real reason for participating. It would be a great thing for alumni to do for their school, but I had no real connection with these things. I guess I just took the appointments to see what they'd be like. I was

very happy to get off them. I had so much to do here by then, you know, I couldn't do it all. I never could have done it all. I really don't know how I did so much as I did. But I was enjoying it, and it was my contact with the world even though I lived in this isolated place. You know, when an answer came back, I had sort of realized a dialogue. I said what I had to say, then I'd get the answer back. And it was lovely. I didn't miss people because I felt that I was constantly in touch with them.

SMITH: You were constantly writing letters to people.

BROWN: A lot of letters, and then a lot of letters to be answered. It was a busy little business running this small shop. Cottage industry. I wrote somebody that my cottage industry has turned into a heavy one. And that's the way it became. I was assiduous. I told you that I would do it when I couldn't sleep at night, because the distance between my work space and my bed was not very great. I could just get up and work.

SMITH: How many letters a week would you be writing, do you think?

BROWN: The Getty [Center for the History of Art and the Humanities] got one drawer of my personal things, so they must have a record there. I just didn't want to be in their way. I thought I'd be a big nuisance, so I would stay downstairs. But I did forget to tell them not to

take one drawer, and I think that list-- I don't know what they've done with it. I would have asked for it back. I would have liked having it. But there was so much stuff. Just so much stuff. And then when it was being shipped, they came with cartons and packed the cartons. I said to David [Stang], "David, would you please make a note on the carton of what it contains." Because this was all brand-new material to them. It would have been utterly befuddling, completely befuddling, if they didn't know. Well, I got them to do that much. I didn't get them to leave that one drawer which had my personal papers--not much, but a little log that I kept. At the end-- Well, somebody came here and said, "Jean, you don't even write down the letters you send and receive?" I have no records at all. But in the end, after that person left, I started to keep records of the letters I sent anyway. That was as much office detail as there was. I just did it, you know?

SMITH: I meant to ask you yesterday what Leonard's education was. You mentioned that he went to Brown University, but I was wondering what he studied, what his major was.

BROWN: Don't know. He was kind of detached in the way that I am. Maybe he was even more detached. He never went back, never.

SMITH: To Brown.

BROWN: To Brown. Finally he did go, I think, to his twenty-fifth reunion, and he came back early. Neither of us is very sentimental. I would have liked to erase my past. He was never very sentimental about his. We never really talked about it very much. Because neither of us were very interested in it. He never asked me any questions about my past. I never asked him any about his. Some people would be very unhappy not to know everything. The only time he went into the Firestone Library at Brown was when he kicked a football through a window. That was interesting. And I think that I want to think about that some more, why we were both so unsentimental. I think when people relive the past, to my mind they become sentimental. But neither of us was.

SMITH: But you had built your own life together that--

BROWN: And it was really quite remarkable. Our marriage was a very passionate one. You know, as I said, I would fight with him; I'd fight dirty if I had to. But it was a very passionate relationship, and he was a most remarkable man. I knew it then. I know it even more now, you know, as I recall him. We suited each other, which was very nice. I could wish that for every marriage.

SMITH: It would be nice.

BROWN: It would be lovely, wouldn't it?

SMITH: I like to think it's less rare than public opinion

seems to hold it, but I don't know.

BROWN: You mean the institution?

SMITH: That people suited each other.

BROWN: It's rare. I would get furious at Leonard, as he would at me, and I remember saying very distinctly to him, "Boy, I hate you. If I didn't respect the institution of marriage so much--" It wasn't he, it was the institution of marriage that mattered, I would tell him in my anger. Reverence for the institution. Well I don't know whether I think so anymore. But I used to think it was the best arrangement that man had decided upon, that man had designed. I have a great sense of family, obviously. And I had a wonderful husband. That would strengthen it, of course.

SMITH: Before you got involved with the art collecting, but say after the war, did you and he have plans for what you wanted to do? Were you motivated by ambitions?

BROWN: Sometimes when we were going on a trip and we were sitting in the car together--and that creates a real intimacy, two people in one car--we decided that everything good that happened to us was the result of chance. Chance. No long-range planning. No big ideas. It was just chance. As Duchamp did. I'm a great believer in the laws of chance. I don't think people can preordain. Or maybe they do, but then it's hard to have

it become a realized thing.

I did have a very great marriage. And then, you know, Leonard was not very verbal. I found out after knowing him--not very long after I met him--that he had been a stutterer in his youth. I think that tends to make one less verbal. He was not very verbal. At first I over-verbalized; I thought I could fill in. But that was dumb, you know. The amazing thing is that after a while, when he did say anything, he became an elder statesman. He said so little that everybody listened very, very hard when he did. He was a great guy, I think. Nothing's happened to change my mind. I was just very, very fortunate.

When I would smoke he used to say to me, "Jean, if you didn't have the burden of me, you'd be running a saloon." And I thought later he was nearly right, because I think I would have been running a saloon. I did, you know. If I didn't have my little happy hour at the end of the-- You know, one day flows into another, especially in a place like this. That was the way I'd break it up. I'd work, then I'd have two martinis. That was my reward. And that was taken away from me. I was ordered never to touch another drop of alcohol. Never. I always told doctors that I drank. And some might say that my illness was the result of alcohol and medication. I never told

anybody I smoked, because I knew that I wouldn't get any sympathy there. But I did mention that I drank, and ultimately I think that was the decision which is-- And so I don't. People say to me, "You were so great. You gave them up." And I think they gave me up, because I never did anything conscious about it. Do you drink?

SMITH: No.

BROWN: Not really.

SMITH: Nothing but a couple of glasses of wine. No.

BROWN: Oh, I was told not even to have that. Is this what you're after?

SMITH: I'm trying to get a personal portrait, and--

BROWN: Not yet.

SMITH: Well, yes, always. Every stroke is part of it. At the same time I don't want to-- I'm not trying to pry.

BROWN: Well, you know, I don't mind. No holds barred. I presume that's probably why you're here.

SMITH: Well-- You had mentioned Arturo Schwarz yesterday. I wanted to ask you if there were other dealers that you regularly had worked with when you and Leonard were collecting art.

BROWN: Those five galleries in New York.

SMITH: Did you go to Leo Castelli?

BROWN: He had just started his gallery, and it may have been in his home. (There was a nice piece about him in

the [New York] Times on Sunday, "The Lion in Winter.") We went up there, Leonard and I. It was uptown then on seventy-something street. And we walked in. A very, very large Jackson Pollock was being taken out, and Leo turned to Leonard and said, "I just refused--" I can't remember how much. A lot of money, what seemed to us like a fortune, for that picture. And Leonard said, "How could you? You refused that much?" "Well," he said, "yes, because I think it will someday be worth much more." That's how good Leo was at it. We bought things from Leo Castelli, pictures from Sidney Janis. Those are two main places.

SMITH: Did you go to Charles Alan?

BROWN: Yes, as a matter of fact. What did we buy from him? He had great things. I was always a little reluctant about these big decisions, because it was not my money. I felt that I was using Leonard's money and therefore I better be very cautious. I don't know what I would have done if I had my own funds. I can't tell you. Charles Alan. What did we buy? He had great things. Didn't we buy those there?

SMITH: The Bruce Conners.

BROWN: Yeah. He had an artist who was very, very great. Another underground from England. Leonard wanted one very badly. I don't know why we didn't get one. He burned

books. Frayed, burnt edges. I'll think of it. Latham. John Latham. The Skoob Tower. Yes. Leonard liked him. I don't know why. Leonard relied on me. He had a very good eye of his own, but I would give a confirmation of whatever it was. We went there. Now, where else? I have a whole drawer of all that stuff.

SMITH: The work that I've seen here-- Well, there's not that much, but it seems that it's very romantic and emotional and sensual, which is in some ways very different from the Fluxus material, which is quite intellectual or quite--

BROWN: Conceptual, really.

SMITH: Conceptual, right.

BROWN: Our pictures were not. Obviously you can see that. I could-- Well, find out from the boys-- Those pictures were put in Princeton [University Art] Museum when I moved here. I had no space for them here. We lived in a very, very large house in Springfield. Fourteen rooms. Seven fireplaces. It was a big, big white elephant that nobody else wanted. We called it a "McKinley stinker." It was that era. But it was a very good house for us. We used all the space. It was a great house I thought. And we didn't pay very much for it because nobody else wanted to buy it. There was not this revival then in old houses. People were building new

ranch houses at the time. So we got it very cheaply. It was a great house. And when I told the boys I was going to sell it, there was no longer any reason for me to stay in Springfield. Leonard was gone. His business was gone. I think I told you that. The boys had grown up.

SMITH: You had mentioned that. I had wanted to ask you about buying the Shaker Seed House, because I thought it was an interesting--

BROWN: I bought it over the telephone. Did I tell you that?

SMITH: Well, you mentioned it was the first thing you had bought entirely on your own.

BROWN: Exactly. After twenty-seven, maybe almost thirty years of marriage, I made an independent move. And it's turned into a nest. As you can see, it's my space. I don't want to be anyplace else. Ever. See what happens there. But that is my hope.

SMITH: Leonard was still alive at the time that you bought this place?

BROWN: He approved of it. I think he thought I had done very well.

SMITH: When did you start collecting the Shaker furniture?

BROWN: In the summer of '68. We had the house. I came up here and started buying Shaker furniture. I had no

expertise and no experience with it, but I just took the chance. Riggs [Psychiatric Institute] is a psychiatric institute in Stockbridge [Massachusetts], all those big buildings. I said, "It's a question of giving my money to Riggs or going out and finding something to do." And it became Shaker furniture. And I didn't know how well I was doing because I didn't know very much about it.

SMITH: Was it expensive at that time?

BROWN: No. No. We had a little handout newspaper, the Pennysaver, and I put an ad in there asking if anyone had any Shaker objects to buy. I soon found out that many, many, many people had rockers for nursing mothers. They used to rock them and nurse their babies. And they had a chair catalog, and the rockers were three dollars at the time. I didn't pay a lot for it. It was available and I got to know the dealers.

After that was done, then I really plunged into the archive. I told you I just sent twenty-five letters out one day. That's what started it. But we did have dada/surrealism at that time. It was just a question of expanding it into something living.

SMITH: One of the big things that you seem to have done was commission artists' books and--

BROWN: Did I?

SMITH: Well, it seems that you--

BROWN: Yeah, I told you that Dick Higgins gives me credit for xerography. And the other thing is maybe artists' books.

SMITH: You seemed to make a project of asking every artist--well, I don't know if it was every artist, but most of the artists that you were involved with--to construct a book for the archive. How did that interest develop?

BROWN: The book. My reverence for the book. I wanted to explore bookness utterly, you know. If it fell off a shelf and hit you on your head, it would have a very different impact. If you used it for a doorstop it would have-- I don't know, the whole idea of the use of books. And then I liked the book. I loved the book. I consider it-- Well, I don't think we'll ever lose it. That seems to indicate that there will be no more books in the sense that we now know them, but I can't believe it. And when television came, that was going to render the book obsolete. It's just probably the most remarkable thing from my point of view. I have deep reverence for the book. And if I did ask people to do books, it's because I liked their work and wanted to have it in book form.

SMITH: Did you ask George [Maciunas] to do a book?

BROWN: He did my guest book.

SMITH: Oh, okay.

BROWN: Which you haven't yet seen.

SMITH: No.

BROWN: I have a bad memory for names, and people would come here and spend all day and I would forget their names. So I had them write in the visitors book. I would refer to it and I could recall the names. My focus was not that much on that. I made a particular point of trying to remember.

SMITH: Let's talk a little bit about Emmett Williams. I'm interested in how you came into contact with him and what your impressions of him were as a person.

BROWN: We had fun together. He was married. He had his son [Gary Williams] then. They used to come. They loved to come here. And Emmett and I would sit around that table in that room drinking. We had great drinking parties and lots of fun. And Emmett's a fascinating man. A lot of the Fluxus things were in roller form. He did an opera. I don't know whether I have that or not. I might have had more than one copy of it, and if I did-- Oh, you would see it at the Getty anyway. He did Fluxus rolls. Emmett was just a fun guy, really. We would just enjoy each other. Did I get him a job? He was at Mount Holyoke for one semester. It might have been through me that he got the job, I forget. But I used to go down to South Hadley [Massachusetts]. I visited him where he was living

then, and then they would come up here. Emmett became Dick Higgins's editor in chief of the [Something Else] Press. That was a weird, wild story and I'm not going to tell it.

SMITH: Why not?

BROWN: Because it comes much more under the heading of gossip.

SMITH: Oh, gossip is part of history.

BROWN: Let me tell you, it's much more gossip than history. Emmett was very nice to me though. I bought his collection. Did you know that?

SMITH: Yes. I know that you sold one of your artworks in order to purchase his collection.

BROWN: Did I? I think I sold a couple of things that were in the house here to create funds. His wife Ann [Noël Stevenson Williams]-- He had had two wives. Ann was his second wife. She was English. She worked with Ian Hamilton Finlay. I think I have a lot of letters between Ann and Finlay. I just read it the other day. She understated her achievements. I think she was one of his big designers. Very nice lady. And Emmett was just fun. He had a great sense of fun. We had such good times together.

SMITH: Did you commission him to do anything?

BROWN: No. He had already done a lot. The Spaghetti Sandwich, he was the inventor. I had all that stuff there

of The Spaghetti Sandwich, which he did with Daniel Spoerri. He liked all of them, you know. Well, he worked with a lot of the Fluxus artists. Interesting man. Was Dick's editor in chief. Then he went to Germany on that DAD project.

SMITH: Oh, the Deutsche Austauschdienst. Yes.

BROWN: And stayed there. He's still there. He had gotten a job at Harvard [University] at the Carpenter Center [for Visual Art]. And it was he who visited George at the end in Boston. There were really not great feelings between George and Emmett, but Emmett went every day. And he'd call me and tell me. He went as his waiter; he would serve him his meals. He'd come in as George's waiter and bring his meal tray in. And he made it into a Fluxus event, kind of. You know, it became a fun thing. And he would call me and tell me what he had done each day. But he was there at the very end, strangely enough. At the very end George, it turned out--I didn't know anything about it, but he had a cousin who was on the staff of some hospital in Boston. And Billie [Hutching Maciunas] drove him down there. He died there.

You've mentioned a lot of estrangement among the group. Oh, I have a funny feeling that that didn't go very deep. Idiosyncratic and they might have blown their tops about it, but then soon got over it. I don't

remember any great sense of enmity, really. You know, that would have-- Me and Barbara [Moore]--I remember that --ended up not talking to each other. But, no, I don't think there were more-- You know, they may have withdrawn, but certainly there was no quarrel about it.

SMITH: Was the purchase of Williams's papers the first big step in developing your neodada archives, your Fluxus/neodada/intermedia?

BROWN: No, that came later.

SMITH: Oh. Because I thought you bought his papers in '72.

BROWN: Did I?

SMITH: Well, that's what it seems to me from interpreting the records.

BROWN: Dick had a place up in Vermont. Emmett moved up there to be the editor in chief, I think, of the press. Was he given a house or did he buy a house? Something that he needed money for. I forget what it was exactly. He brought down all of his stuff. I looked at it, and I said I would take it. And I'm sorry to say I don't even remember how much I paid for that. Was there some record somewhere? I don't know.

SMITH: I think you paid $3,000 for it.

BROWN: It's there, huh?

SMITH: Yes.

BROWN: That's what I paid then. What did it consist of? Anne's letters to Finlay. Emmett's-- Well, a lot of Emmett. That was a large corpus of material, I think.

SMITH: Yes, it is. It's quite a few boxes.

BROWN: Intact. Well, either Emmett gave me that price for it, or I offered that much and he said that was fine, just would do it perfectly. But there was consensus about it.

SMITH: Did you stay in contact with him over the years? Have you stayed in contact?

BROWN: He called me from Germany once just to check in and report. But not more than that. You know, when people would ask me did I want to meet so and so and so and so, I would say to George, "I'm not interested in people. I'm interested in material." I didn't need a vast social life certainly. I needed things that would expand my activities. If I gave Emmett the $3,000, I'm trying to remember what he needed the money for. He was very, very, very happy. They had a wild ride home Anne told me later. They were just exuberant. What did they do? Something happened. But they were so happy about the whole thing.

SMITH: Did he have other collectors?

BROWN: Emmett?

SMITH: Emmett, yeah.

BROWN: He must have sold things. I don't know.

SMITH: It seems like so many of the people you were dealing with were living on the edge, always on the edge of poverty, I guess.

BROWN: Well, most artists were then, you see. It was not a very affluent kind of activity. It has just become that. When I told you George would give his boxes away for two and three dollars, I presume only because he needed the cash. Now, I don't know what they're worth now. I have no idea, but I'm sure they've appreciated considerably. I do remember paying $150 for Jon [Brown]'s Murillo box, and that was practically-- It was a lot of money to him, but I think it was practically a gift. It was all I had, too. I would have given George anything he asked if I could.

SMITH: What about Ben Patterson?

BROWN: Ben came here. I bought Ben Patterson's archive. Ben was a librarian. It was very well organized. He had a choice of selling-- You know about Backworks. Barbara Moore and Jon Hendricks entered into a partnership and created Backworks. I have some of their catalogs upstairs still. I had duplicates of those. I kept one of the duplicate copies. Ben offered it to them, and he offered it to me. According to Ben, there was a lot of finagling going on because they didn't really have the money. They

took everything for Backworks on consignment. But whatever I gave him pleased him. He needed the money. Do you have a record of that? It will be somewhere.

SMITH: Yes. Looks like it's 1972 as well, that you bought his papers and Emmett Williams's papers at about the same time.

BROWN: And how much--? I paid $3,000 for Emmett.

SMITH: Three thousand dollars for him, too.

BROWN: That's what they asked for it.

SMITH: It doesn't seem like very much money.

BROWN: It wasn't. But it was a lot more then than it would be now.

SMITH: Well, true. Yeah.

BROWN: An awful lot. I mean, that was quite a lot of money then. Three thousand dollars is ridiculous now, for almost anything you buy. [tape recorder off] I don't know whether I should tell this or not.

SMITH: Well, you can always seal it later.

BROWN: When Ken Friedman came, he told me that Dick was selling his Something Else Press archives. My relationship with Dick was a sometime thing. Dick and I were very close. He says that I'm the living person he's known the longest, because I remember meeting his family when he was a baby, so I've known him longer than anybody else. Well, okay, I went up to-- Dick was then living in

Vermont. In Barton was it? Maybe I have a record of that someplace too, the place in Vermont. And he wanted to sell the Something Else archives. I went up and I looked through them. Then I stayed over night. The next morning I asked him how much he wanted for them, and he said $25,000.

SMITH: This was about the same period of time, would you say?

BROWN: Earlier.

SMITH: Earlier, okay.

BROWN: And there might be a record of that someplace in the collection, too. It took me eight hours to get up there. It was right close to the Canadian border. But I had eight hours on the way back to reflect, and I decided really I didn't want them, that they would not enhance the collection. So I called Dick-- Oh, when he told me $25,000, I asked him how he had arrived at his price. And he told me. I don't remember what he told me, but he could justify it. On the way back I thought, "You know, I don't really want these records of the Something Else Press. They belong maybe at Harvard Business School or someplace like that, that kind of an institution. So I told Dick that I was not going to have them. Actually, I felt that they were more than I could afford, too. But also I didn't think they would enhance the collection very

much. I told him I was not going to have them. And then I later heard he had sent them to Hans Sohm, the whole thing. He gave them to Hans. Hans gave him nothing. And he also paid for the shipment of it to Stuttgart.

TAPE NUMBER: IV, SIDE TWO

FEBRUARY 25, 1992

SMITH: You were saying everybody gathered--

BROWN: It was a very gay time. George was here. Everybody. Almost the largest Fluxus event that I had ever had here. We were having a great time. Dick started singing sea chanteys, and he has a very nice voice. We were just all sitting around that table having a quite marvelous time. During the course of that time Dick said to me, "Jean, would you like my personal archives? Because I give them to you." After the Sohm experience, I said, ""Do as you like." It really did no longer matter. But about three days later the files of them appeared. Four very large file cases. Well, I always felt a little bit strange about it because I really hadn't asked for them. You know, I'd made no commitment about them and there they were.

So when the Getty was buying the archive, I wrote Dick a letter. I said, "Dick, all this is going to be transferred to the Getty. You have three options: you can take them back, you can leave them here until you need them, or you can try to place them with the Getty." Dick came down the day of the last removal of material and David was here. And Dick said that he would like them to

go to the Getty. And David went off into the bedroom and he had some kind of telephone conversation with somebody at the Getty, and they arrived at a price and an agreement. So they went there, and Dick was paid. I don't even know how much he got. I never asked him. But I think he was very satisfied, and I felt better about it. Because I never really had the feeling that they were mine. They were just sent here, you know. I could never figure that one out. But I was very glad it turned out the way it did, because I think that Dick was very pleased. He's a good friend of mine. I'm the person on earth who has known him the longest, he reminds me.

SMITH: So how did you know his family?

BROWN: Oh, we had a friend, a mutual friend, who moved from Springfield to Worcester [Massachusetts], and Dick's family came from Worcester. Worcester Pressed Steel. His grandfather has an armory museum in Worcester, the only one of its kind. He collected armor. I've known him longer than anybody else on earth. There is a bond. I haven't seen him since the day he came here with [J. M. "Mel"] Edelstein. He came when Edelstein came. But I would always have that feeling about Dick whether I saw him or not. My affection for people does not change because I do not see them often. I don't even know what he's up to these days, but I'll find out. And I have less

energy and less curiosity now, too.

SMITH: What about Bob Watts?

BROWN: Are we going to have tomorrow, babe?

SMITH: Yeah, we'll have tomorrow. Do you want to cut it?

BROWN: Yeah, because that might be another chapter.

TAPE NUMBER: V, SIDE ONE

FEBRUARY 26, 1992

SMITH: The other day you had mentioned how you and George Maciunas would sit at the kitchen table and discuss projects. T-shirts. There was a whole idea for T-shirts that came up. I was wondering if you could just come back to that.

BROWN: He was much better at it than I, I can tell you that. What could replace the T-shirt, which had become such a symbol in our time? We'd sit there and we'd talk about it. We never got very far. We couldn't think of anything that was better. The Fluxus artists made objects. I have an apron George designed. I think I have one--it was pictured someplace and I had one--which he made using the interior organs. He did a lot of that with Bob Watts. What was the other one? Well, we'd have to go up and look. There was another apron. I had pictures taken. All the people loved to put them on and take pictures of them. I didn't get copies obviously. Fluxus artists designed jewelry.

SMITH: A lot of the sort of design ideas of the eighties sound very Fluxus. Do you think there was an influence, a direct influence of Fluxus?

BROWN: I think they would be the innovators, not the

result of the--

SMITH: That's what I meant, that Fluxus ideas influenced designers in New York.

BROWN: George made a whole series of stationery. The hand was the writing paper; the glove was the envelope. The nude lady was the sheet of paper; the fur coat was the envelope. What else was in that series? The foot in the shoe, I told you that one. They were very ingenious. I wish I could remember them all, but I don't. But I may have had extra copies which I kept.

SMITH: It also sounds like a lot of this just sort of came from sitting around the kitchen table and just talking.

BROWN: Fanning the breeze, see what we could come up with. I can't say we were very original or inventive, but we sure talked about it a lot. If we had any really viable ideas, I think George would have produced them. But we spent a lot of time on the T-shirt. Never made it out of the T-shirt either. Jewelry. Tattoos. Those are out there. Then there was a series of place mats. Was this Emmett [Williams]'s? I don't think George had that. Leftover plates of all the famous artists, what they left over. [Daniel] Spoerri. Who else was on that? There were a whole series. Geoff Hendricks. Who's left? Do they have a Duchamp leftover meal? I don't remember. But

there were a series of them. Perhaps about six different artists. Okay. Emmett Williams did a portfolio of those leftover meals. It's at the Getty [Center for the History of Art and the Humanities]. But it might be worth looking at as long as we're on the subject. I'm trying to remember what George did. His Ping-Pong rackets.

SMITH: Ping-Pong rackets?

BROWN: They're extraordinary.

SMITH: What were they? I mean, how do they work?

BROWN: He inserted a lot of things into the racket which made it a very-- Well, it was a fascinating looking object. George said that you could play Ping-Pong with it. I never thought so. Spiky things, balls-- What else was in them? He hollowed out the center and inserted all these funny objects and said that it could be played with. But I never thought it possible. Well, other than the T-shirt, I don't think I'm thinking of anything very much.

SMITH: Did you guys talk about shower curtains?

BROWN: Duchamp did. Helene [Verin Ripps] said she had a--I have it too--shower curtain of Large Glass. Why do I think the Museum of Modern Art sponsored these objects as multiples?

SMITH: The Fluxus objects?

BROWN: No, the shower curtains of Duchamp's Large Glass. They were going to underwrite that project, and I've

forgotten who made them. There are probably a lot of things like that that could be picked up and used as commercial objects. George would have loved that. He just would have wished to have-- He wanted to break down all the barriers between art and life. That was very important to him.

I went to Princeton once to visit Jon [Jonathan Brown] and there was a young man there who was working with a computer. I must have come by George's on the way home, and I told him about this computer artist. He said probably it wasn't going to be very interesting to him, because the one commodity that artists had the most of was time and nothing should be utilized that used time more rapidly. He did not want it accelerated. I thought he might like to know about this, but not at all.

Well, mostly I think I have to say we talked about the T-shirt. That was our main concern. Great idea if we had thought of something. In his stationery there was also a shoe, a man's shoe. The foot was the writing paper; the shoe was the envelope. What else was there? This is when I miss the collection, because I could go right up and-- But I'm not in any condition to go right up anyway, so--

SMITH: I think we get the general-- The materials are in the collection.

BROWN: I'd like to be more comprehensive. I think I should be able to do it, but at the moment I can't.

SMITH: But I was more interested in sort of the process of how ideas got generated.

BROWN: Fanning the breeze.

SMITH: Right.

BROWN: And I would have to have a recollection of what conversations took place.

SMITH: You also wanted to talk about George Wyllie?

BROWN: Yes, and I don't know why. But I like him so much. But I like so many people so much that-- Well, did you ever hear of a sculptor called George Rickey?

SMITH: No.

BROWN: He does things that are activated just by the wind, the air. No motors, just-- George Rickey. He lives not too far from here, I think only in the summer. Santa Barbara in the winter, I think. Near you?

SMITH: Yeah, that's near me. A hundred miles.

BROWN: Not so near you. George Rickey's father worked in Scotland. I don't know what his job was. But Rickey lived there; George Rickey was raised there. And Scotland was going to give him a very great celebration for either his seventieth or his seventy-fifth birthday, I don't remember. Of course these sculptures that propel themselves are huge and very, very heavy. And George

Wyllie just went up to George Rickey and said, "If you need any help, I'll be very glad to provide it." I'm sure he needed plenty of help.

And as the result-- George Rickey had turned his summer place here into an art colony. He bought a lot of houses, he and Edie [Rickey], and they would take people in for the summer to work. A person could do his work independently, and they provided the atmosphere and the meals and everything that went with working all summer. Because he had helped George install his seventy-fifth birthday installation, [George Wyllie] was invited over by the Rickeys to be a member or a party in the colony. So George came over. Edie tells me that he asked her if she knew anything about Fluxus. "I know the Fluxus mama," she said, "and I'm going to send you there." So Edie called me and George Wyllie came. He took early retirement from the customs office in Scotland to be an artist, because he always wanted to be an artist. Early retirement. I'm trying to guess his age. I'll guess sixty, around there. I think I once knew, but I've forgotten. And George came over, came over a couple of times.

Very ingenious, very resourceful artist because-- Well, he came and gave me a gold brick. Obviously one deals with currencies in the customs office. He brought me a gold brick with a handle. It's at the Getty. He was

fascinated by America. He made a huge American eagle. You know, who would want an American eagle? He was going back to Scotland. But riding on the turnpike from West Stockbridge [Massachusetts] when he'd gone to Boston, he said, "My goodness. Why don't I give this to the turnpike authority?" So he went into the turnpike authority's main office, offered them the eagle. Happy to accept it. It's now hanging there. And then he participated-- Friends of mine were at the Edinburgh Festival. He did a performance in there which they said was incredible. He sent me the cane, an artifact from his performance. He headed down a big hill-- Oh, I guess the photograph of that is in the archive. And then he constructed the largest paper boat in the world. Here's the boat. There's London Bridge.

SMITH: And it's floating on the Thames.

BROWN: Then he decided to bring it over to the United States. I was invited to its landing, but of course I couldn't go.

SMITH: He sailed it across?

BROWN: I think it was set sail at some point. But it was the largest. I wrote to him and I told him how pleased I was and for pete's sake get yourself in the Guinness Book of World Records, because I think it's probably the largest of its kind. I haven't heard from him since, but he did call me once after I became ill. Very dear man

with a lovely wife. She helped him in his work. Daphne [Wyllie]. And she was a charming lady. But starting out on his career at sixty. I was very impressed. The realization. Most people have dreams that are never realized, but George's were. And the last thing I did with George, I got the invitation to the landing at the [World] Trade Center in New York. Then he called me, I told you. I haven't heard since. There was a very close tie. There was a very close tie with a lot of people that I should want to remember. I would like the George Maciunas book inserted somewhere.

SMITH: George Maciunas: Fluxus and the Face of Time by Fred Truck.

BROWN: I would like Fred Truck and his output to be highlighted.

SMITH: Fred Truck and his electric bank. Fred Truck. Is that his real name?

BROWN: Exactly. Now, where does Fred live at the moment? I forget. Iowa is where he lives. Once he sent me something that came in a very large box, and I made that into a Fred Truck museum. It's gone. It's at the Getty. All the artifacts were in the museum, which he loved. Which I loved doing for him. He was a very young man and married, had a young son. I picked him up in Lee [Massachusetts] at the bus stop. It was about eight or nine

o'clock in the evening. We came here. We sat down in the kitchen to eat, stayed up all night talking. Dawn had broken. I did a lot of that, but Fred was one of them. Stayed up all night long talking. I became a mother figure maybe too, you know. I was interested in the people that came to me. That's why they loved it, I guess, all the resources right here, everything they needed. And they could stay and do their jobs. I always wanted to do more about Fred Truck simply because I thought so highly of him. He had a vision on a mountain and you know-- A vision on a mountain might sound a little far out. But he convinced me. He had changed his whole life because of this vision. He was studying to be a theater something. He had a scholarship to a very good place--I've forgotten where-- where one studies the theater. And he dropped it all after his vision and went on to become an artist. Conceptual. I think that must have been one of the first computer books. He did that all here. Everything that's in that museum came from here. I did not even know he was doing it.

SMITH: No?

BROWN: Never asked him. Just gave him everything he asked for. You know, I just would pull out the things that were necessary and leave him until it was mealtime.

SMITH: Did you have a xerox machine here? A photocopy machine so people could copy things if they wanted?

BROWN: It's in the Lee library. I went to the library.

SMITH: So you did that yourself?

BROWN: Of course. Short of giving the original source materials, I would have done anything. I was a study collection, and if I set myself up as that, I wanted to be the best possible one. So I did whatever was necessary. And it served well, I think.

SMITH: That seems to be a general consensus.

BROWN: Made a lot of friends. There are lots of people that I should include. Mirella Bentivoglio. I used to call her "my great Roman lady." She is from Rome. Extraordinary woman. Ended up working for the cultural ministry. I should include all these people because they are so special and they will be-- Well, Mirella made her mark.

SMITH: Did you travel to Europe at all during this period?

BROWN: I could do more, I finally decided, by just sitting at my desk and answering the mail that came. I never went anyplace. After Leonard [Brown] died I went on a Greek islands tour. Why did I go to the Greek islands? Because Leonard never wanted to go. It would be okay--I wasn't depriving him of anything. These fantastic notions that people develop. But I didn't go elsewhere. I could get more done by staying right here

and using the mails.

SMITH: Obviously a lot of people came here. Plinio Mesculiam, did he come here to visit or was everything done by mail?

BROWN: He numbered each series and would send them to me. Have you seen that?

SMITH: I looked at that. That's really fascinating.

BROWN: Fascinating.

SMITH: Fascinating, yes. Some of it's really striking. Some of it is not to me, but that's-- Some of that is just personal taste.

BROWN: What an undertaking that was. I told you I got a letter asking me for the name of ten Americans with whom he could start the project. Off the top of my head I just gave him ten names. And that started it in America.

SMITH: I noticed there was a poster in the collection from 1981 called "Micromuseum of the World," and the Brown archive is listed there, along with the Centro Mohammed and other archives, the CDDA in Spain, Romano Peli, and--

BROWN: Who did it, I wonder.

SMITH: It didn't say who did it. It was just like this Christmas tree with these eight organizations, and you're one of them.

BROWN: Believe me, I don't even remember. I don't remember that object.

SMITH: It sounded like-- Who was it? Micro Hall Center. Archive Small Press in Belgium. Michaela Versari and Romano Peli--in Milan, weren't they? Were they in Milan?

BROWN: I don't remember.

SMITH: And Museo Cavelliniano.

BROWN: [G. Achille] Cavellini.

SMITH: Cavellini, right.

BROWN: I have loads of his stuff. He was just a self-made person as far as the art world is concerned. He did incredible things through mail. His books are in the archive. Self-publicist. One of the great ones, all-time greats. Fred Truck made him a suit. Fred Truck would have an annual day of events. Where was he in Iowa? And everybody entered. You know, they did a whole performance thing. And he made a Cavellini suit, which is out there for one of his-- I forget what he'd call those days.

SMITH: Cavellini came to the interdada festivals I know. Did he come here and visit you?

BROWN: No. That's a very interesting phenomenon, those people who are self-publicists. He just publicized himself. And there were several like that. Iris Clert in Paris, we went to her gallery. And she did probably issue one of the first news bulletins. Instead of announcements she would do a news bulletin publicizing herself. She also used it in connection with exhibition announcements,

and there was something always about the artist. But these self-publicists were kind of fascinating, I thought.

SMITH: So their art work was publicizing themselves?

BROWN: Cavellini's was. He published a whole series of books about himself. They're at the Getty. How many? I wish I could remember the titles of them, but I can't. I haven't looked at those in years.

SMITH: When we left off yesterday we'd mentioned Bob Watts, and I thought we ought to get back to him.

BROWN: Bob? George [Maciunas] always called Bob Watts his partner. They did projects together. George never said one unkind thing about Bob; Bob said plenty about George. I don't know what to make of that. Bob came here once-- Oh, the day that George brought his mother [Leokadia Maciunas]. I told you after he stayed here, he asked could he bring his mother. The three of them came up together. Bob didn't like George's mother. George told me that Bob did not open his mouth once on that trip. He deposited George and George's mother, and then he was going on someplace, I don't know where. But Bob told me at some juncture that his father was-- His grandfather played cards. He marked the cards.

SMITH: Oh, a cardsharp.

BROWN: A cardsharp, exactly. And he said, "My grandfather taught me all his tricks." So he knew them

all. And he was the one who did illegal Fluxus. You know about that.

SMITH: The money and the postage stamps.

BROWN: Uh-huh. What else did he do? Money, postage stamps. I may have to think hard to think of what else. But he did all the illegal Fluxus. He loved it. And he was very good at it. Baseballs autographed by artists.

SMITH: Did he get in trouble?

BROWN: Did you see the stamp machine?

SMITH: Yes.

BROWN: Bob used to lift those, I think. But he never got in trouble about it. Then he put his postage stamps in, and that was brought to me with his stamps in it. Fun thing. What did George tell me? Something about a slot machine in which you put a dime and you got back a penny. They were done, you know, for fun. And they could do them. George and Bob were great forgers. George did boxes always, you know. He gave me one plastic box that spelled out my name that is at the Getty. Then he gave me one of my birth date, and the cover of the box signed by me and the date of my birth. Absolutely a great forgery reproduction. He could copy it. "Just leave me alone," he said, "for a few minutes." And Bob was the same way. Bob--and this is also at the Getty--went out for a walk one day while he was here. When he came back he had found

an old baseball. I had to leave the room while he did the baseball. Obviously this required great concentration. But he had a perfect forgery of Jasper Johns on the ball, on the old baseball that he found.

SMITH: Forged signature?

BROWN: Absolutely correct. Then Bob did a series of baseballs. Did you see those?

SMITH: Yes.

BROWN: He autographed them with artists' names--Marcel Duchamp--instead of baseball players. That was a very ingenious idea. When I think of it, Bob did a lot of great things. But he had also said those unkind things about George. And that colored my feelings about him, because I didn't believe anything he said. A whole group, Bob Watts among them, came here from New Marlborough [Massachusetts]. He let off all his steam about George and I didn't like it. There were about three or four other people here. George could do no wrong in my eyes. I knew every one of the faults, I knew every one of the difficulties. Who was it who one day said to me, "You know, a lot of people aren't as fond of George as you are"? It meant nothing to me. I liked him, and that was enough. And I don't like gossip particularly, so it would make no impression on me at all.

SMITH: There's a letter from Bob Watts in the archives

that was interesting for both the bitterness and the split in what he wanted to do. Because on the one hand he talks about how he's producing work and he's selling it at Leo Castelli's for several thousand dollars, and then the same work he's selling through Fluxus for fifty dollars. And he can't understand why he's doing it. And yet he continued with Fluxus.

BROWN: He had a real tie with it. I don't know whether you know that before Fluxus came Yam Day. Did you see Yam Day things there?

SMITH: Yes, I did.

BROWN: That was a collaboration of Bob Watts and George Brecht. George was working as a chemist. He was working at Johnson and Johnson. And Bob Watts was teaching at Rutgers--[the State University]. They were very close neighbors. They organized a festival, Yam Day--"Yam Day" spells "May Day" in reverse--which later became Fluxus. All the Yam Day things became attached to Fluxus. George Segal came here, the sculptor. The first Yam Day things were at his chicken farm in New Jersey. He gave the space, because he had a big bunch of acreage and they could use it. And Mrs. Segal said to me, "But I made the condition of no coming into the house to use the bathroom." She didn't want them inside. I have a lot of things of Yam, I think. I think I tried to get them all.

I don't know whether I did or not. You see, it was ongoing. There were two other things that helped me a lot. Well, I told you I had a standing order with presses that I could have their output, which simplified it a lot for me. And what was I going to tell you about Fluxus and Yam Day? I don't know. Well, I was on file with anybody I could file with to provide these if they turned up. Most of them I had to find myself. So you can see the advantages of just staying here and doing it.

SMITH: By finding it, meaning you had to write the people.

BROWN: Send out feelers. Always feelers. Yes. A list of most wanted, you know. Desiderata, actually.

SMITH: But a lot of the stuff is ephemera of the most ephemeral quality.

BROWN: The key documents if you wanted to do a history. I was after those. Because I told you, if I was going to have a study collection it had to be the best possible kind. So I just conducted a constant search. But then the people who knew what I wanted helped. If they came across it they could provide it.

SMITH: And you may have been at that time the only person who was--

BROWN: Nobody wanted them. Nobody wanted them but me. Well, I had a kind of prescience about--based on my

dada/surrealist experience, you see--what would be the next wave. And I opted for those things, and that's how I got them.

SMITH: What about George Brecht?

BROWN: Never met him.

SMITH: You have that beautiful card box upstairs. You bought that from him or from a gallery?

BROWN: The playing card box. Oh, you know where that was bought. At Macy's department store. Arturo Schwartz had a showing, a pre-Christmas exhibition at Macy's. Leonard and I went there and that's how we bought the house of cards. We bought that then.

SMITH: So that goes way back. That's not so much conceptual art as just--

BROWN: Oh, I don't know. I think it's a wonderful thing. I told you I had it hanging at children's eye level. I was into Fluxus then, I think. I must have been or I wouldn't have bought the George Brecht. I was with Leonard, who very kindly bought it for me.

Arturo had been to our house and we developed some relationship. He was at the Springfield [Massachusetts] house. We picked him up at Yale [University] at the museum there and brought him to Springfield and he stayed overnight. He had a lovely time. He wanted us to come back to New York with him. Then he did a wonderful thing

for me. He had Duchamp sign all the rotoreliefs, probably the only set of signed rotoreliefs extant. He had him sign something else. We just gave them to Duchamp and he had Duchamp autograph them. That was very pleasing to me. What was it? He took two or three things, I think, had Duchamp sign them. I think in the end he-- Well, he supported Duchamp, who needed money to live. Duchamp couldn't have cared less about money, but he needed to live. And I think he sponsored him. We went to his gallery years and years ago. Who was there and told me he had a whole set of ready-mades for which he wanted--? Maybe it was a half a million dollars. I don't remember.

SMITH: Now, Claudie [McGuire] told me that you went out and got your own collection of ready-mades. She showed me some photographs. You got a shoe rack.

BROWN: Bottle rack.

SMITH: Bottle rack. Excuse me.

BROWN: Yeah, I bought it in the store. It's at the Getty. I had bought one. It wasn't an identical one to the one Duchamp used, but it was a bottle rack. But then I found it right here in Great Barrington [Massachusetts], the one that was identical, for $12.95. And everything that Duchamp did was, you know, anonymously done. So he signed the rotoreliefs and what else? The surrealist exhibition thing, the one with the bosom-- Do you know

that one?

SMITH: I'm not placing it.

BROWN: If you go behind you, that black box-- My kids just gave me that for my eightieth birthday. It's a Duchamp catalog, and the bosom's in that. Just copies of it all. I was so thrilled. That was the best present I could have gotten. The cover is a chessboard. Open it. It opens.

SMITH: It opens. Okay.

BROWN: Flags, those are flags.

SMITH: Flags, right.

BROWN: And the woman's bosom is in that. It's a very small example. Are there objects on the left? The bosom's in there.

SMITH: Well, okay. I'll look at it later.

BROWN: Well, it was lovely of Arturo to do that, because everything that Duchamp did was anonymous, you know.

SMITH: Did you know La Monte Young?

BROWN: Met him once. I think I told somebody that I had some poison pen letters in the correspondence. And he used to tease, "Release your poison pen letters." But the only real poison pen letters were from La Monte Young about George. I forget to whom. No, I had a lot of La Monte Young's output, but I never met him. There was a big rift between George and La Monte over-- Do you know

the thing called An Anthology? I think it was over that. I think La Monte--this is from my reading, this is not from my experience--wanted to publish it himself but somehow never got around to it and then finally gave it to George. And it's a very handsome publication. George designed the whole thing. And I wanted it--I didn't have it--and George didn't have it. Then George went over to La Monte, in spite of the fact that they were not on the best of terms, and got me a copy. It was quite expensive, and George said, "Yes, you're right. I agree with you. But La Monte loves money." But I got it. That was the important thing, actually. Because it is a key document. Like Cabaret Voltaire would be for the dadaists. I was so pleased to have it. George would do anything for me, as I would for him. It was a very great mutual arrangement. Based on what I don't know, just a mutual regard for each other. I thought he was just about the greatest, and I think he was. Nothing's happened to change my feelings about that.

SMITH: We had mentioned Arturo Schwartz, and I had wanted to ask you if you had gone at all to the Ruben Gallery. Because I think that was one of the main places where Fluxus had been exhibiting in the sixties.

BROWN: We went there. Not a lot. I don't think we bought anything there, because we were involved in dada at

that time. I had not arrived at the Fluxus thing. Although strangely enough, I bought everything of Something Else Press. I'd just go in and visit Dick [Higgins] and take whatever he had published.

SMITH: Do you think that was maybe because you knew him on a family level?

BROWN: I loved the things he was doing. Mainly it was for his publications.

SMITH: Did you know Bern Porter?

BROWN: He's been here. He was funny. Dick liked Bern a lot. Dick liked Bern. Bern came here one day. The only way he could get here was one of his friends, and the wife drove him. He did not drive. He did not have a car. He was so strange. I bought a couple of his mail things. He would tell me that he would have mail art, an accumulation of it, and how much he wanted for it. And I would get the accumulation and I'd pay him what he asked. I think maybe all those records are there. In the course of it-- I don't know why I have to tell this. Just that it was funny.

SMITH: That's a good enough reason.

BROWN: He said to me, "Why don't you give me your archive, Jean? I'll take good care of it." Which was a pretty bizarre request. Then when they were leaving, he said, "Do you mind if we eat our little sandwiches in your

back behind your house?" I said, "No, not at all." But it turned out he didn't have any little sandwiches. And so I made a sandwich lunch for them all. Do you attach much significance to Bern? Do you think he's important?

SMITH: Well, he's certainly important in terms of Henry Miller. Whether he's important in terms of Fluxus, I don't know.

BROWN: A lot of mail art. I told you I would buy it. He would tell me he had an accumulation and how much he wanted, and I would send the money and he would send me the mail. But it was better that it was here, at least as a record of it, you know? And anyone who considers it important would be interested. He also invented Found Poetry.

SMITH: His papers are now at UCLA.

BROWN: Somebody came here from the University of Maine, where he has his papers. Did you know that?

SMITH: No, I didn't know that.

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BROWN: The first time I heard from him he said he didn't have enough to eat. And I sent him--

SMITH: This is Bern Porter?

BROWN: --enough money to eat. The first sum I sent him, he told me what he had bought with it. He sent me a list of all the purchases he had made. Bread, sardines, I remember as being on it. And then this young man came from the University of Maine. He said, "I wouldn't worry so much about him." Because, well, I think he said he had very good connections or came from a well-connected family, that he was not impoverished, which would have bothered me enormously. You see, if I could prevent that, it would be the least of it. And that's all I know about Bern. Dick will know loads about him. Dick published him. Dick thought very highly of him, by the way. But because of the peculiar circumstances of what happened to him here, I could form no opinion. I can just tell you what happened.

SMITH: I had wanted to ask you also about Alison Knowles.

BROWN: Dick's wife.

SMITH: Right.

BROWN: An artist. Dick was married to her. They had

twins. The twins must be young women now. I can only tell you it was very strange. I don't know whether I want to go into the details of why I've come to that conclusion.

SMITH: We can seal it, remember.

BROWN: Do you think I should tell you?

SMITH: Yes. When you read it, you can mark it if you feel you don't want it on public view at the present time. You can mark it for sealing.

BROWN: Why should I tell it though?

SMITH: Because it's part of the social milieu within which the Fluxus scene and the neodada movement operated. The psychological reality of the people.

BROWN: Would a biographer tell of things like that?

SMITH: It could. Depends on the particular thing you're studying.

BROWN: You know, I hold Dick in enormous esteem, too. I consider him a very, very dear friend. I almost think I would want to ask him if he minded. I think he would mind. These are personal, intimate details of the lives of these people. I don't like to gossip, and this is a form of it to me.

SMITH: I mean, you have to make your own decisions. Just history-- Particularly in the arts, it's difficult to separate the personal life from the work that's created.

And sometimes these sorts of stories--

BROWN: "Mind that creates--" What was it T. S. Eliot said about the difference between the man who suffers and the mind which creates? I've forgotten. I don't know. If I were writing it myself, I wouldn't have written it. That answers it almost, doesn't it? Married, divorced, and then one day years and years after-- [tape recorder off]

SMITH: Well, Alison Knowles had started the Women's Art Magazine, and there is some correspondence in your archives from her, from Ginni Lloyd, from a couple of other people that indicates that some of the women felt-- Yes, Ginni Lloyd complaining about sexism in the Fluxus/mail art/neodada scene. And I was wondering what your perception of women's role was.

BROWN: Well, the role that women had at that time was a minor one, until they became militantly aggressive and have made great strides for themselves, I think. Alison was quite feminine. She would not be part of that. Allan Kaprow's wife came here. She was part of a big, big movement. They had a building in San Francisco, didn't they? Women's something. I never subscribed to any of that. I thought it was too militant. And if an artist was good, what difference did that person's sex make? You know, a big question to myself, shall I

develop the archive in that direction? And I've decided not to. And I was very pleased that I had not.

SMITH: Which direction?

BROWN: Women's lib.

SMITH: Oh, the women's movement.

BROWN: With women's lib, I had many requests from women who would like to have made that separation, but I did not want to. The quality of the artist was the important measure. It didn't matter what else.

SMITH: So they wanted you to develop a separate women's art archive?

BROWN: I got a lot of mail from them that would have become that had I sorted it and ordered it that way, but I did not want to. I think now it was a good decision.

SMITH: Yesterday when we were talking off tape, you had mentioned that Nam June Paik was a special person in terms of--

BROWN: George [Maciunas] loved him. George held him in enormous regard. And I think maybe why I mentioned it was-- When I called Barbara Moore, she said, "I dare not have tapes made of George." I've forgotten why. I was very exasperated with her. I guess maybe I thought I shouldn't be the person to initiate the tapes idea, because she had been in the movement so much longer and she had a stronger, firmer position in it. I told you she

did every one of George's errands. Anything that he wanted that was the least little bit-- [tape recorder off]

SMITH: Nam June Paik. And you were saying that you wanted to do a tape of George and Barbara Moore--

BROWN: She was not in favor of it. I don't know why. I was just very exasperated, because it would be marvelous to have had him on tape. He did one. It probably went with all the other tapes I had. When Paik asked him, he said he'd like tapes very much. I went out and I got a tape recorder and a tape. And he did one only, because right after that he went to Boston, where he died. But it would have been a wonderful series. Then Larry Miller did an interview with him which is very, very good too.

Did I tell you that Paik called me? He would always call at eleven o'clock at night. He stayed here for ten days with me. He loved it here. He got fresh air. Paik's a hypochondriac. He was coming for fresh air. And he stayed ten days. Then we had an arrangement where I found him a place in town where he could stay. And he called me one night at eleven o'clock and he said, "Jean, I'm trying to decide whether to go to Stockbridge or Tokyo." Well, I couldn't help him. But he didn't come here, so he must have gone to Tokyo. A real fun guy too. What would he do in the time he was here? I said, "Why don't you write a book, Paik?" At that time it was the

interval of the great gas shortages where we had to stand in line. Did you have that in California?

SMITH: Oh, yeah.

BROWN: I said, "Why don't you--" Paik was an electrician. I mean, the performance part came after the training. In his New Yorker profile it says that he was the George Washington of television. I have it someplace, either here or the Getty has it. I said, "Why don't you write something about a gasoline substitute." And he started to write it. I never read what he wrote. But I think I kept it, I think I sent it out. Such a great guy.

I should tell you this at this time maybe. I told it to Julie [Lazar], who came from the museum in Los Angeles [Museum of Contemporary Art]. Paik was very-- [John] Cage was on tour. If you read the Larry Miller interview, George would say that wherever Cage went, he always left a little school behind. And Paik-- I think it was in Düsseldorf, and Paik was very, very eager to make an impression on Cage. So he went over to him and he cut off his necktie.

SMITH: Right.

BROWN: You know that.

SMITH: Yeah.

BROWN: You know at first that Cage was very annoyed with him, but then later saw the humor of it and laughed with him. And I started to give those neckties. Gave one to

Julie. I made a relic of it. Because-- Did I tell you--I think I did--that when George was introduced to my son he asked him if Jon knew the number of the nails of the true cross? Well, out of this I made a relic of the necktie. I must have distributed about twenty-five of them. I told Jon about it. He just dropped in one day out of the blue. I told him about it, and he was delighted. He thought that was a great joke. I might even give you one.

SMITH: Oh, that would be fun. A relic of the true tie.

BROWN: The tie. Of the true tie. Typed on the typewriter while he was here.

SMITH: The typewriter? Oh, that's right, that only types "G.M."?

BROWN: George's initials. There was one at the René Block gallery which typed only "Fluxus." I wanted very much to buy that, but I didn't. I know when I talk to you I sound like the fisherman, the one that got away. I always talk about the one that got away. Well, I didn't buy it. I was very, very sorry. But when Paik came he did the "G.M." one, and it was very dear of him. He was a fun guy, and we had a great time together, actually. And again, perfect agreement, perfect accord about everything. You know, we just happened-- We agreed. It's much easier to be with people like that, isn't it?

SMITH: Yesterday you'd mentioned that-- Well, I wanted to

ask you about Dieter Roth, and the first you mentioned was "bookness."

BROWN: Yes. I think that Dieter Roth-- Have you seen the collection there?

SMITH: Yes.

BROWN: Incredible. He just explored the boundaries of books. And since books are a very favorite object of mine, I just-- It was just unbelievable. I don't know what he's doing now. Hansjörg Mayer used to publish them all. It seems to me that Dieter Roth had a son, and he's-- Where was he from? From Iceland. Was he?

SMITH: Dieter Roth? No, I thought he was from Germany.

BROWN: I don't know whether he was born in Iceland and then went to Germany or came from Germany to Iceland. I don't, but you could find that. And I thought that he had started a press of his own with his son. I haven't heard a word. I don't know whether it goes on or not.

SMITH: Did you have personal contact with him? Did he come here? Did you put a standing order?

BROWN: Hansjörg Mayer was his publisher. Hansjörg was here maybe twice. I knew that I wanted everything of his press. It was a most remarkable press. I hope I have everything of it. I went to visit him once. He came here twice. He was living in London. And Jon, my Jon, and his wife [Sandra Brown] took me to where he was living and we

had a lovely visit. They were both very impressed with him. He had a lady, too, with whom he was living. And he thought that London was the most civilized city in the world anywhere. He didn't particularly like to be where his press was. I don't know why. Charming, brilliant. He taught also in England. I did have one book, which is among the many that he did with his students. I'm trying to think of where the school was. It is in London. I don't remember the name of it.

SMITH: Was it the school attached to the Tate Gallery?

BROWN: No, but you would find the book there and you would find the name of it.

SMITH: Okay.

BROWN: He loved teaching. He was a most lovable, remarkable man. And being on standing order made it that much easier. His catalogs were beautiful. They're all at the Getty. Susan [Reinhold], my Bob's Susan, told me that the last time she was in Europe some dealer told her that someone had raided or broken into Hansjörg Mayer's printing plant and stolen all the books. But I don't know. I'm pretty out of touch with all of it now. I don't know. Well, I was very aggressive. And, you know, when I stopped it probably stopped. I wasn't answering letters. But people have been so great to me. The reason I didn't answer the letters was, okay, I might make this

supreme effort of writing to them, but then I'd always get an answer, which would encourage doing it again. And I understood why, but I just am not up to it. I've had it. Did all I could do, all I have to do. All that was in me went to the archive.

SMITH: Another person that seemed to be important was Robert Filliou.

BROWN: I loved Robert Filliou. I met him only once. He came up to New Marlborough to visit George and then we drove together to New York, all three of us. I just had an enormous reverence for Filliou. He was a saint to my mind. Everything he did. Just a perfectly pure man, I thought. Well, when Robin Crozier organized his memorandum thing-- Robin Crozier had the same feelings about Filliou that I did. Filliou had entered that memorandum project. And after Robert died, I wrote to Robin Crozier and said, "If you will permit it, I will ask John Cage to take the place of Robert Filliou in the project." Then I wrote to John Cage and he said no, he would not enter the project, because Filliou was still so much a part of it he didn't want him replaced. And that was lovely I thought, too, and understood perfectly. Nobody could replace Filliou. He had a shop with George Brecht. I had two copies of a book. I must have given both to the Getty, because I can't find one. But there's

a letter from me in that book.

Years and years before I even thought of anything in the way of an archive, I wrote-- Filliou had a gallery which he carried in his hat. And one day he lost his hat, which was just so typically Filliou. I wrote and wanted a copy of that. He had made a multiple of it, of the beret with all the works of art in it. I wanted a copy of it, and I wrote. Although there was one thing that they were offering, a multiple by George Brecht and another one by Robert Filliou-- I didn't know which to take. And that letter is at the Getty.

What else can I tell you about Filliou? I had a lot of great things from him that were there, and I held him in enormous regard. I just loved him. I thought that John Cage's response was absolutely appropriate. Nobody could replace Filliou. I think George felt that way about him too. He had been preaching and practicing. He had cancer. I guess Robin Crozier told me about it. He was going into a monastery for one year. Was it for one year or just going into a monastery? He went and he left the monastery anyway. It was no holier than himself or than the rest of the world I think is what he found. And then I wrote a letter to Marianne [Filliou], his widow, and I think she answered me. It's here someplace. I really loved that man in a very special kind of way. I had

enormous affection for George, as you very well know, but to me Filliou was most special. Brecht, I don't know about Brecht. I never met him. I have loads of his stuff, though.

SMITH: Do they come directly from him, or was that sort of--?

BROWN: I might have garnered some. I know I garnered some by purchase from Jill Johnston. Who else? George. Emmett Williams, also.

SMITH: Was Brecht interested in the archive?

BROWN: That whole series of things. [tape recorder off] The Brunch Museum.

SMITH: The Brunch Museum, right.

BROWN: He had done that with a guy from England. I have that correspondence, too. And I had some correspondence about that with him. We wrote. I bought a lot of things on installment too, by the way.

SMITH: Yeah. The Brunch Museum, that's a big series, isn't it.

BROWN: Yeah. It needs restoration. Twenty-some panels. I don't remember how many. I think I have them all. And it needs work. But I'm not going to do it. So I had a correspondence with George Brecht about that. I went off to Rochester once to some kind of convention at the Rochester [Institute of Technology] School of [Art and]

Design there. Dick [Higgins] was very kind, picked me up and took me there and then brought me back. And on the ride up Dick told me that George Brecht holds the patent for Tampax. He was a chemist with Johnson and Johnson. I don't know whether that's true or not, but I was told that. And he does not care to live in this country at all. He cares to live only in Germany. Susan, my Bob's Susan, went to where he lives. She wanted to buy a Brecht. She regards him very highly. He was making crystals then and she bought one. And he lives in this middle-class suburb outside of Stuttgart in an apartment house. Typically middle-class place. She said he talked a lot about moving, but he has not moved, probably never will. And why did he stay in Europe instead of being in the United States? Well, he sold more in Europe. He had more contacts and more people collected him there. I never met him. The last I heard about him he was studying Chinese. And there's a lovely book in oriental calligraphy that he made you will find at the Getty. It becomes sort of mystical, I think. George adored George Brecht and Paik and Watts. He loved them all.

SMITH: Then I wanted to ask you about Astrid and John Furnival. That seemed to be a particularly close relationship.

BROWN: It was. I just have difficulty remembering how it

started. Did I tell you about one day when I was in the depths I wrote twenty-five letters?

SMITH: Yes.

BROWN: Well, he was the result. Whether he answered or not I don't remember. But he's the result of those letters.

SMITH: He was in England at the time?

BROWN: I don't even know where I got those twenty-five names. But I must have culled through stuff I already had and selected, because I wanted visual poetry, and John is just great at that. John is a most remarkable artist. And he came with Astrid. He stayed here for a few days. I love them both very dearly. Extraordinary people who were busy every second they were here.

SMITH: Doing what?

BROWN: They had work to do. They brought work. They found work. I mean, they just were going a mile a minute. Astrid is a most incredible knitter. And I'd get a letter from John telling me that they were off to the Hebrides, where they would get a dye. She made her own yarn, you see, and she got her dyes and she had her own sheep. And he wrote me once-- What did he write me? Astrid had a pair of sheep that looked like the king and queen of England. Strong resemblance. Well, that was a very, very rich, fulfilling relationship. And they were very, very

hard workers. Then Jonathan Williams got John Furnival a place at a colony. You know, Jonathan Williams-- I don't know how much he's in the archive. He's a poet. Man of letters.

SMITH: Jargon Press.

BROWN: Yeah, Jargon Press. A man of letters, really. Well, he writes. Somebody sponsors him and gives him the use of his house in England. So Jonathan lives half the time in this country and half the time in England. Very, very dear friend of John Furnival's. How did I meet John? Well, I think John was a result of all those letters. And everything I asked him to do he did.

SMITH: In terms of documentation?

BROWN: In terms of finding things for me, too. He went to very great lengths for me. I knew at a certain point what I wanted most, and he would always come up with it. I don't think he ever disappointed me.

SMITH: When you started out, how familiar were you with the British and the European neodada scenes?

BROWN: I must have had Hansjörg Mayer's catalog. I don't know, it's a crazy kind of network. These things just surface as if by magic, because I can't account for it any other way. I can't account for what I did, actually. It was pretty crazy then to do visual poetry. Nobody was interested in it. And Fluxus. All those things. I think

they all came to me in a vision.

SMITH: A vision? Do you know the day and the place?

BROWN: No. But I told you I had people here who would talk to me all night long about their visions. I'm not very much of a vision believer, but I think I had to give credence to what they told me. There is a spirit life and there is a spirit world, and I believe it because I believe them. I have no connection with it, but they would tell me the most wonderful stories about things that had happened to them. And of course I was all ready for John Cage, because I believe in chance, chance operations, and I think I'm here because of chance. I have found no other way to explain it really.

SMITH: How many works did you commission from the Furnivals?

BROWN: He had a press. What was the name of his--? I got everything of the press. [Openings Press]

SMITH: What about--? I mean, the big works, like The Vowel Screen. Are there other things besides that?

BROWN: Oh, I was offered one of those by an English poet, who offered it to me at a ridiculously low price, but it was big. Again, outside of the archival context, like The Felt Suit, that kind of thing, and The Raining Window-- I was not really collecting art objects or works.

SMITH: You have a whole room full of objects. But some

of them-- Like, what is it, the Bentivoglio piece, Piove, which is really delightful.

BROWN: She came here. She's a great lady. That's my noble Roman lady is Mirella. She came. I think she came twice. I had to have them. They're small in scale, actually. Even the rain thing on the wall. And the Fluxus boxes. I mean, I had to have those if I were going to have a corpus. But big, elaborate works? I was offered a Furnival screen once for a ridiculously low price. One of the artists with whom he had worked-- I didn't take it. And when John Furnival came-- "You know, I was offered that screen," I said, "and I'm so mad I didn't take it, but I didn't feel I had the space for it where it could accommodate itself easily into the archive." And I said to him, "John, why don't you make me a table-sized one." That's what I got. And whatever I got I took.

SMITH: In the correspondence it seemed you-- He had made it vertical, and you felt it should be horizontal.

BROWN: I don't remember that, but--

SMITH: What was interesting to me was the give and take that you had with him.

BROWN: We were very good friends. He knew I would do anything for him and that I felt he would do anything for me. I think he is an extraordinary artist. He has

collaborated a lot with Jonathan Williams. They're close collaborators. Another person like John Furnival--he was here once, but I didn't have that kind of a relationship--was Tom Phillips. Do you know the book A Humument?

SMITH: No.

BROWN: You look at it. That was the biggest turn-on that I had in the whole collection for people who came.

SMITH: Why was that?

BROWN: Why? Because of what he did. Because of the way he worked with material. He was in-- What's the big--? In London, where they have the flea market. I've forgotten. He was there one day. Tom Phillips was there one day with somebody very well known--I've forgotten who it was--and he bought this Victorian novel which was called A Human Document. He reworked the whole thing into The Humument. He used that text and then redesigned the whole book. He made a record of it too. It's at the Getty too if you want to hear it ever. I had a standing order for that. I would wait for the next volume to come out, and as soon as it appeared it was sent to me. Matthew Tyson--what's the name of his press? I've forgotten the name of his press. But A Humument was just so great. I have a record of Tom Phillips reading it. You know, it was a turn-on, really pretty incredible and going on for eleven volumes. And the last that he did was

Dante's Inferno or Paradise, I guess one of the Dante folios. He was doing the translation and doing the illustrations. And after he finished it all, it burned in a fire. He started right over again. It's now out. I was buying it. For some reason I didn't feel I could afford it--it was kind of expensive--so I would buy one folio at a time. I hope the Getty finishes it. I would have ultimately finished it. But whenever I had some extra money, I would send it on to Tom for another sheet. Tom is most remarkable. He's done extraordinary things. He worked with John Furnival a lot, and that's probably what the connection there is. They collaborated. Do you want to hear all this?

SMITH: Yes.

BROWN: You're kidding. So boring, isn't it?

SMITH: In '83 you wrote a letter in which you said that you were now going to concentrate on lettrisme and sound poetry. And I was wondering how that-- The way it reads in the letter it's as a shift, as if you had completed a certain aspect of your work and now you were going to focus on--

BROWN: No, I think I just wanted to introduce it into the archive. I may not have said it very clearly, but it was essential. Sound poetry, that was the next link in the trajectory. These things just evolve. I mean, you get

involved, and you know how one activity leads to another. I always wanted to stay within the context of what I had hoped to do. And then John Furnival had a great press. What was it? Openings Press. He worked with a friar--not a broiler but a friar, not a roaster but a friar. Dom Sylvester Houedard, who was a monk who lived close to the Furnivals and did extraordinary works. They're all there at the Getty. A real pioneer in the movement. When they came I asked Astrid about Dom Sylvester, and she said, "You know, Jean, he almost broke up our marriage." Obviously he kept sending people to the Furnivals. They were close enough geographically to impinge. They didn't want to hear very much about him. But he was very good at it. I have a lot of his things, three drawings. John just did everything I ever asked of him, as I would have for him, too. And then when he came I was so pleased. And Astrid was this very great knitter. She made sweaters. Lauren Bacall had one. She had an agent in Beverly Hills, I think, who found her all these wonderful people, important people to buy her knitwear. I wanted a Fluxus sweater once. And John sent me a sleeve so I could see what one would look like. I don't know why I got cold feet on the Fluxus sweater, but it was never done.

SMITH: No?

BROWN: I should have. Another one that got away.

SMITH: And then Dick Higgins was going to write a history of sound poetry. Did you commission that?

BROWN: Pattern poems. No. That was a love of his. It was another bond that I had with Dick, and it was a mutually reciprocal one. I would do anything for Dick and Dick would do, I think, anything for me. I bought some of Dick's. He had a lot of it, visual poetry material, he wanted to sell, and I bought it from him. A whole little corpus of visual poetry. And paid it on installments. Dick, I think, was very close to the archive. As close as he could be to anything. You know, he does so much. He just does so much. I guess maybe-- I think he's probably-- No, I can't say genius. I reserve that word I think. But might be. Very close anyway.

SMITH: Did you have any connection to the magazine Visible Language?

BROWN: A subscriber. Once I suggested to a couple of people that if they wanted published articles to submit them to Visible Language. Is there a copy of it there [at the Getty]?

SMITH: Yes, there was a copy there.

BROWN: That was when they had the lettriste exhibition. And who had an article? Oh, I think that that issue of Visible Language became a catalog, the [Ruth and Marvin] Sackner collection. And then people I know-- Did I ask

Dick once? You know, they were looking for people to edit an edition of it too. I asked Dick if he wanted to edit it, and I forget whether he said yes or no. The only reason he would say no is because he had twenty other projects going at the time.

I had a young man who came to me. The Sackners came here with Tom Phillips. I had my visitors book on the table in the hall. The last thing I said to them was, "Oh, you must take this number." Oh, when [Maurice] Le Maitre signed, he made me promise not to tell anybody. But there it was in the book. I mean, he's already announced it himself. The Sackners took it and they went to him, and I think they bought everything of lettrisme. I had some which I'd been stockpiling for a long time before, but they far outpaced me. They loved it. Visible Language. Nothing more than that. I don't know whether it's still even being published. Is it?

SMITH: I haven't seen a copy in a long time.

BROWN: I stopped getting it. I didn't know whether because I had not resubscribed or whether they stopped it.

SMITH: Actually, back to the Furnivals, I wanted to ask you about the concept of chain letters as an art form and how you go about documenting that.

BROWN: Do I have many chain letters?

SMITH: You have some, and you seemed to participate in

them.

BROWN: Then I must have. They were never in the same category as mail art for me. A chain letter is a chain letter, you know. And the whole focus was a very, very different one. I didn't like them. But I did like mail art. Now, if I had some chain letters and I answered them, then I did it. But with no particular emphasis on that.

SMITH: Okay.

BROWN: Mail art always.

SMITH: You mentioned René Block a couple of times today, and I had wanted to ask you about the degree to which he had been able to help you. Was he interested in the archive?

BROWN: He loved all the Fluxus people way, way, way early on. George [Maciunas] brought him here. He came a couple of times. He liked George very much. I didn't buy the [Joseph] Beuys Felt Suit there. I must have bought certain things from him, though. I don't remember what. If we need to know, I still have my correspondence. That is available for me to check on anything. Ultimately it will go to the Getty, but I needed it. There's that one drawer with all my notes and everything in it that they took. I just didn't have the heart to ask them to go search through everything. It was such a muddle that I

just felt really it would be asking too much. It should not have gone. I should have just told the packers that that was my drawer, but I forgot. There was stuff all over the place in closets up on the third floor. They had plenty to move. My periodicals were on the third floor. Fortunately all arranged chronologically so that they knew what they were getting just by looking. But there's a lot there. What do you think of the archive?

SMITH: Well, it's irreplaceable.

BROWN: You do think so?

SMITH: I don't know that there's anything equivalent to it anywhere else.

BROWN: I was the only crazy fool who did it. Seems to me that Elmar [Seibel] told me that at the time that they acquired mine they acquired another one by a German. I wish I could remember his name.

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FEBRUARY 26, 1992

BROWN: What was I saying, babe? I don't remember what.

SMITH: That the Getty [Center for the History of Art and the Humanities] had bought another archive from a German.

BROWN: Oh, yes. And I wish I could remember the name of the man. But he died, and it was lost or burned up or something. Who told me this? I don't even remember who told me. But the daughter to whom it was left replaced everything. And I think that I had a couple of announcements that came from that archive, and it again was an extraordinary one. Not like mine at all, but extraordinary. And did it have some dada in it? I don't know, maybe a lot of German expressionism. No two alike in this field of collecting.

SMITH: What about Wolf Vostell? Did you know him well?

BROWN: Did a lot of weird happenings. I have a lot of them. I wanted something of his, again which I purchased on installment. Paid him it all, and what I got were xeroxes of all his events. A notebook of them, a spiral notebook. What do I know about him? He was a very good friend of Dick [Higgins]'s, and I know about him from Dick. I had a lot of his things. They're all there. He did one periodical article that was extraordinary.

Irreplaceable. I know people can't get it. It just doesn't exist anymore. I had all the numbers of it. He was very strongly Fluxus oriented. Why don't I remember the name? From not having contact with it for a long time, one forgets. And there was certainly a great deal to remember. The film and video director of the Whitney [Museum of American Art] came. He owns a summer place not too far from here. He was very interested in Vostell. And I provided a great deal of information for him. I'm just mad. I can't remember the name of that periodical.

SMITH: Well, we can fill it in. That's no problem.

BROWN: He was great. Then there's his own museum. I think he opened his own museum in Spain, of all places. But I think because his wife was Spanish he must have been going there a great deal.

SMITH: Ben Vautier?

BROWN: Ben I met-- I got a call one day from a faculty member at the University of Iowa. He said he would like very much to do-- I guess it was Fluxus, visual poetry, all those vanguard movements. And by the time I got through talking to him, I said I would send him some kind of a prospectus, which I then did. I didn't lend, but I knew all the lenders, you see. That was my particular value in that situation. And a long while afterwards he said that my advice was very helpful, useful, wise, and they were going

ahead. And they did, and I was invited out there. They were also going to start a collection of Fluxus too. I went out, though, and Ben was there. I guess he was going to be a participant in this seminar. Ben did something that was incredible. Because there was a flow from dada into Fluxus which was not even perceptible. You know, it just so logically followed. Ben was very, very good. Ben thought, I heard later from somebody, that I was a dilettante, that I just played at this. That was a very, very good impression of him. I thought it was pretty great. And I have loads of Ben things, don't I.

SMITH: Yes, you do. Yeah.

BROWN: I wanted them all. I hope I got them all. In this book--

SMITH: The [Pierre] Cabanne.

BROWN: The Cabanne interviews [Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp], Cabanne says [to Duchamp], "There's a young man who lives in the south of France by the name of Ben who says that he is your spiritual son." And then Cabanne says, "Is he?" And Duchamp says, "If he thinks he is, he is." That's so typically Duchamp. He never engaged in any controversy. No polemic. Perfectly neutral about everything. I would like to have been like that. He had his emotions so well in control. I envied that. I don't envy people, but I envy that quality.

SMITH: Were you a person that got involved in polemics and arguments?

BROWN: Well boy, if you're married and have a couple of kids, do you or don't you?

SMITH: Well, sure.

BROWN: You can't be neutral.

SMITH: I'm sure even Duchamp did.

BROWN: He didn't have any kids. He didn't have to worry about that. But he let people say whatever.

SMITH: But in the field of art did you engage in polemics?

BROWN: Oh, everybody did, you know. People would pick one artist against another and would--

SMITH: But did you?

BROWN: I hope I didn't.

SMITH: I mean naturally you have your favorites, but to say that somebody appeals to you doesn't mean that somebody else is crap.

BROWN: No, I did try not to be judgmental. I was doing an archive. I wasn't a critic. You know, I didn't want any-- I tried to be impartial, which is sort of the only way that one could go about it. If you started taking positions, you might end up with an encyclopedia but not with an archive. I tried to stay out of it.

SMITH: So were there people that you collected whose work

you really didn't care for, but they fit, so you had to?

BROWN: Oh, I found it all quite marvelous. I was in love with it. Everything I collected I loved. Sometimes I wouldn't see something because it was stuck away for a long time, and I'd find it and fall in love again. Well, if it were a movement, I might not have liked a couple of people. I would have them anyway. But most of the things I loved. I just loved them. I wanted to be part of them. Mostly I wanted to perpetuate them for the world to see. I told you, if nobody had come I would have gone on doing it. I really think I would have gone on doing it.

SMITH: I wanted to ask you about the kind of dreams that you had in terms of the archives. It struck me that the school--the New Marlborough--there was a connection there, that if that had worked out you would have achieved what you really wanted to get at.

BROWN: Oh, I would have liked more people to know about the work. And everybody who came I tried to turn into a collector. I thought it was particularly proper for young people who didn't have a great deal of money--they could still be collectors if they wanted--who couldn't afford large works. I became kind of a crusader for that. I don't think I accomplished very much. But in the end it was mostly artists who came. I couldn't tell them to be collectors. I mean, you know, that would be absurd.

SMITH: But you have scholars who come, very many.

BROWN: Oh, I always would try to convert people. Always. Because I love these things. I just fell in love with them, and I was wishing that other people felt the same way and would want them.

SMITH: Did you hope that your activity could somehow create a place so that museums and the galleries would have to give more recognition to--?

BROWN: Oh, I think museums were a possibility. Every time I made a gift it was one of that kind of thing. But dealers wouldn't like it. It wasn't in the high price bracket, you know, the echelon of grand works. It wouldn't have been very profitable probably for them to sell. They were in business to realize a profit, and these were the interstitial things. I often thought that instead of an art gallery there should be a writers gallery maybe. I don't know who would come there and who would buy the things. I wonder why people didn't like it as much as I did. I never found out.

SMITH: We had talked about Ken Friedman a little bit, but I wanted to come back because we didn't really--

BROWN: You can take that off the record.

SMITH: Well, we'll see.

BROWN: Because one of the letters either he wrote to me or I got in some way, he said I was like his mother. A

mother and child had arguments and disagreements. And I had never thought of myself in that context. I think I was very open with everybody. Do you think I'm open?

SMITH: Yes.

BROWN: I think it's my way. It just happens to be my way.

SMITH: You had mentioned--this was off tape and something that I did want to get on tape--that you had gone to him because you needed someone to work with you to help establish prices.

BROWN: Yeah, so he could go out and do lectures. He's brilliant at it. Just really can do it. I couldn't. And I just thought he would go out and promote the cause. And he loved it, too. I mean, he would have, but I just felt he was undealable with.

SMITH: But you had mentioned that you needed someone--Well, there were a couple of things. One, you got in touch with him through George Maciunas?

BROWN: I think it was Hans Sohm who put him onto me.

SMITH: Right. You said that. Yeah.

BROWN: I think it was. And then I got a letter from him, and it sounded like a good possibility.

SMITH: And he had all this Fluxus West material.

BROWN: Which he wanted to bring. I said, "Don't you bring anything to me." That would have made an enormous

confusion, you know. I don't think it would have worked at all. In the light of what happened-- I just sent him off. It would have been beyond me.

SMITH: It sounds like he wanted to be the director of the archives.

BROWN: This is off the record.

SMITH: Sure.

BROWN: Dick knew it and Dick laughed when we talked about it. He [Ken Friedman] wanted to know if we could have charge accounts in restaurants in the area. He finally ended up asking if he could be a cosignator of my checks. And I don't have charge accounts of restaurants in the area, you know. It's an extreme thing to need. But he would have expected more than I could provide, I think. I was sorry because he has many, many talents, but wrong personality. He told all of it to Dick. Dick laughed. He thought it was very amusing. I didn't think it was the least bit funny.

SMITH: You were just starting out at that point.

BROWN: I had already established it. Everybody knew it was formed, but it needed to be ongoing. Ken had lots of contacts. In the end I really didn't want anything from him.

SMITH: He then offered you the Fluxus West archives. Did you buy that? No?

BROWN: No. I would certainly remember that, as I'm remembering much else. No.

SMITH: Part of what interested me is the question when you set up something like this-- The balance between private interests and public interests, and how that seemed to become a little bit of an issue and how you conceived in your own mind what was your obligation to the public and what was essential to your own private concerns.

BROWN: Well, I made it a study collection. I admitted all kinds of people. You probably should take a look at my guest book before you leave to give you an idea. Some people I forgot to ask to sign, but there are a lot of signers. What do I think of it as? My collection which I would want to be used by who needed its information. That's all.

SMITH: But the collection was to represent your viewpoint.

BROWN: Oh, yes. It was my choice of what it contained. I made all the selections. But anybody who needs it would be welcome. Oh, I think Ken started me on mail art, now that I think of it. I was trying to remember how I got into it. But that was through Ken.

SMITH: Your relationship since then has been really good, as far as I can tell.

BROWN: He writes to me all the time. I never answer him. He loves polemics. Maybe not anymore, but then he did. He wrote me one letter-- I'm trying to remember what it was. I was going to tell you. Oh, well, something to do with the Getty. I don't remember what. I didn't even answer it. I knew that would have started a whole business, and I just wasn't up to it really. I don't think I answered him very much at any point after he left anyway.

SMITH: There was this whole business that came up after Maciunas died about whether anything that was Fluxus could be owned by anybody, and therefore was there a Maciunas estate or did the Maciunas materials really belong to the group. Do you remember that?

BROWN: I told you he offered me his documentation.

SMITH: Right, yeah.

BROWN: Billie [Hutching Maciunas] was here. I couldn't say yes. It would be like sort of seconding his last will and testament, you know. That would be proof positive that he would not survive, and I couldn't tell him that. Well, when he offered it to me-- I told you that same day I realized that maybe this was a very good place for it and that I really wanted it. I better just make that very clear that I sought it. And I told Billie. I drove over, saw Billie, and told her that I really wanted it and that

I would purchase it from her. But that didn't amount to anything.

SMITH: To what degree was this connected to the whole Fluxus way of working and the Fluxus ideology that there was no personal ownership of those things?

BROWN: Well, he had things that were his in his possession. So those were George's. Before that he kept giving things to people. People kept coming up and taking things. But I really wanted no part of that, because that was not my intention.

SMITH: I mean, do you think that--? Without necessarily you calling any names, were there people who were looking to you as a gravy train?

BROWN: No. George gave a lot of it, but Backworks was starting then. So he gave it to Barbara [Moore] and Jon [Hendricks]. No, I don't think so. Everybody knew that I had gotten everything legitimately by purchase. It was therefore mine. But I would share any of it, as I did that thing that his mother [Leokadia Maciunas] wrote. George Brecht wrote me a letter telling me that I should get everything that George's mother had to say some way. She was living in Florida. I wrote to her. She sent me back this thing in Russian. I paid to have it translated. Anyone who wants it now is welcome to it, you know. That I thought belonged to everyone. He did a lot for a lot of

people. I thought that was in the public domain. Any information that I had was. And I told you about my feeling for him and my desire to perpetuate his work. I was funny, I think. If there was any strangeness, I was as strange as anybody else, because I had refused that documentation that I really wanted ultimately. I just didn't want George to think he was going to die. Once he authorized its departure, it would acknowledge his demise. I couldn't do it.

SMITH: It also seems in that situation that a lot fell on Billie Maciunas's shoulders that she wasn't in any way prepared for.

BROWN: She didn't like Fluxus she told me. But then it ended up very, very well for her. I told you she came here when the telephone went out and the heat went off. I said, "Billie, it's time for you to move. Come on over." I did not particularly like her. You know--

SMITH: It seems like you helped her or gave her advice when she was thinking about going back to school.

BROWN: I would do anything for anybody. I was a service agency for so long it didn't occur to me to like or dislike, you know. Whatever I could provide-- By then it had become part of me. Okay, she got a lawyer in Pittsfield [Massachusetts] and she went to Portugal for a year. I didn't know that. We were not in touch. She

came back and she said, "Jean, I'm here and you know why." It was to settle George's estate. I knew why. She said, "I need a place to live." I said, "Billie, why don't you call the chamber of commerce. They usually have listings of places." And she called me back. She said, "I did exactly as you told me and I got a place." What she did the rest of the time I really don't know. The lawyer told me later-- Oh, he came here once with her. The lawyer told me that he had found a loft. I don't even think George knew he owned it. He found a loft in one of the Soho buildings, and it was sold for $120,000 or $140,000. I don't remember figures very well, but around that.

SMITH: A lot of money.

BROWN: A lot of money. Billie came into a lot of money. I was very pleased. I don't grudge anybody anything they can have legitimately. Then she left. She had spent the year in Portugal. She was going to learn Portuguese.

[tape recorder off]

Well, I think I was talking about Billie. Oh, she came here one day with her lawyer, who said, "George must have given you a lot." And I said, "George gave me nothing." I wouldn't have taken it, because he needed money. I knew that. And then they were going down the next day to New York, and he asked me if I wanted to go. I didn't want to go. I don't know who had all the

SMITH: No, I hope-- Not really.

BROWN: It was a strange time, I must say that. And Bob Watts could have been a whole legend by itself. I would think that you might want to see some of these people, actually, and try to put some of the other pieces of the puzzle in it. Bob Watts died and left everything to Larry Miller. Larry had been a former student. There was a very, very close tie there. What happened was Bob-- He called me once. This was the last time I saw him. He called me once. Claudie [McGuire] was visiting, as a matter of fact, and he was up in the area. He had found a lady. Could he come and visit? Which he did. It was a very nice visit. It was the last I saw of Bob. I think his death was a complete surprise to me. I don't even know who told me about it. He looked fine, seemed fine the last time I saw him, but I don't know what-- I guess Dick told me about it.

SMITH: Then in the eighties, it seems like you developed a whole new set of connections.

BROWN: Do I?

SMITH: It seems like. Maybe you can tell me if I'm reading the archives correctly or incorrectly, because there's a younger generation that--

BROWN: Is there? You know, isn't that awful. I don't remember. Refresh me.

SMITH: No.

BROWN: I don't even remember it. I remember Vile magazine, but I don't remember ever-- I remember Anna Banana. I remember thinking very highly of her, too. I held her in great esteem. She'd have all these contests. Nobody won, nobody lost. I loved that. They were non-competitive. I loved that about them. I don't like competitions particularly. I wouldn't do anything to extend one or start one, agree to one. Not my way. Everybody's equal. Only some people are more-- Well, you know, I don't like competitions anyway. That's what I loved about Fluxus. So open. You know, George would put-- When I asked about Ken Friedman, I said, "Many people have asked me why you keep him." He said, "Because he wants to be." Oh, boy, you know, I wish the world functioned in that way.

SMITH: Well, with the generation that comes up in the seventies, what did you think--? They are different than George Maciunas and George Brecht and Ben--

BROWN: They're a whole other portion. They were an autonomy. I would not have related them to Fluxus. They were separate movements, I think. I don't know what you're talking about, but I--

SMITH: Well, I was wondering how you viewed the generational differences, the distinguishing

characteristics.

BROWN: Sex, age, nothing really. It just really so happened that everybody who was interested in what I had was young. You know, we all want our own intimations of immortality. They wanted records of their time on earth. Maybe that's what prompted me to be what I became. I could never have been a historian.

SMITH: With all these young people, did they contact you or did you contact them?

BROWN: It could have happened either way.

SMITH: It seems like there are just hundreds of people that are involved. And many of them--

BROWN: I know that if I saw something that sounded interesting I would pursue it. In some cases I'm sure many people sought me out, too.

SMITH: Do you remember Mark Bloch?

BROWN: Oh, I love him. Yeah. He did my video. He edited my video. Came here a lot. Last time I heard from him he had just finished an unhappy love affair, and I was a little heartsick myself, because Mark's a wonderful boy. I gave him some money too. You know, I shouldn't even mention these things. It was all part of it. You know, it was the way I functioned. But he had this unhappy love affair with someone who was living in Northampton [Massachusetts], which is a pretty great distance from New

York. And I was sort of wishing-- I thought he'd have a better chance if they were close. It's hard to arrange these things from a distance. He came here. He was very talented, I thought. I thought that he should go to MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] School of Visual Design. I told him I would do everything I could to help him. He agreed that that was probably where he belonged, but I don't think he ever got there. Which is too bad. He called himself Peter Pan, I think.

SMITH: Well, Pan Man.

BROWN: Pan Man. Exactly. I had a whole stash of his mail stuff. He's a singularly nice young man. That was my last time with him. The Gerlovins [Rimma and Valery] shot the video and he edited it. I like him.

SMITH: It seemed, from reading the correspondence, that he recognized in himself an inability to focus on things, which I think is why he called himself Pan Man. His attention always moved. Was that peculiar to him, or do you think that was something that was more common in the neodada circles?

BROWN: The inability to focus?

SMITH: Maybe that's too strong, but a very wide vision.

BROWN: Great talent most of them probably had, but unable to focus right into it, you see, which I think is a necessary requirement, knowing their desires. I had

focused in, and I knew it was possible to make choices. Of course it's much easier when you are in a position to do it. But if you are starting out with nothing, and he didn't have very much-- But I do like him. You know, the young people just latched on. Why? I was a mother figure. I was sympathetic. I would do everything I ever could. There wasn't so much I could do, actually, but I would do it if I could.

SMITH: You weren't judgmental in the negative sense.

BROWN: Never. I mean, I had no reason to be. Nobody needed to know my opinions.

SMITH: Well, they seemed to seek out your opinions.

BROWN: They sought out me, not my opinions.

SMITH: Then another young person that you seemed to be close to was Betty Danon.

BROWN: Yeah, I owe her everything. She was so good to me. But there again, if I write there will be a response and I'll start another correspondence. It would be very rude not to. Listen, I was pretty good at this stuff. I used to answer most things within twenty-four hours. I think a great deal of the success of the archive depended on that. The echo back. Very, very important. And Betty did so much for me. I don't think I ever repaid her half enough.

SMITH: Well, what did she do for you?

BROWN: Wrote to me. Sent me lovely things. I loved what

she was doing. She would set up in a square in Milan if she needed something to do and attract people to come to her. And very successfully.

And Amelia Etlinger, I mentioned her to you. I showed you the card. Amelia finally suicided. Her husband called me. He did not want to tell me the method she chose. But I think I asked him, and he told me. She locked herself in the trunk of her car until she expired. But I heard from Lou, and the last time I heard from him he told me that there was a woman who was divorced, and Amelia had said to him, "You know, if anything happens to me and you ever marry, it will be this person." He was seeing her. And I think probably they got married. Amelia was this fey, elfin, otherworldly person. He was a bureaucrat. Second tax man--not the director but the co-director--of the New York state tax system. And she was this otherworldly creature. She elected to have this place be the repository for her things. I told you for a while I was getting a work a day.

SMITH: Yeah, you mentioned that.

BROWN: Then she had an exhibition of visual poetry at her little local library. She asked me if I wanted it, because they weren't using it. And they sent it to me. Then when the Getty thing was made, I asked them-- I hope they did it. I was sending it all out there. I asked

them to acknowledge it at least, you know, because they were the ultimate recipients. And the library was very nice about it. I hope the Getty did. Well, I think I tried to make that clear to them.

Amelia was just pretty incredible. A work a day. Her first work was very linear, exact, typewritten things. And she blossomed out into this. I went to visit her once. I felt I should--she invited me and I should go. I had no reason for not going. Lou opened the door and he said, "This is a very new stove, Jean, a very new oven, but I can't use it. We can't use it because Amelia used it to bake her work in it." Her objects that she made. She was an incredible artist. Well, you're hooked to the recorder, so you can't-- But I'll show this one thing in that room. I don't know. I had one of her things in every room. We looked at it a lot. The kids looked. The people who came here decided the person to whom her work was most comparable was Joseph Cornell. She was a kind of Cornellian artist.

SMITH: Did she know Cornell? I mean, did she know of his work?

BROWN: Did I ever ask her? I don't know whether I ever asked her or not. One day I got a letter from her in which she told me that a friend of hers called from California. Amelia had a brother out there whom she

hadn't seen for several years, and he had died. Oh, she went into mourning. This friend I think either called or wrote her, "How do you feel since your brother died?" That's how she was informed of it. And I wanted to console her in some way. I remembered that it was on Leonard's birthday that her letter arrived, and I told her that. I just hoped to assuage her grief, that's all, thinking that, you know, these things happen to other people too. Well, she reclaimed her brother's body and had him buried in her own family plot. She sent me a spoonful of the dirt from the grave. And I understood perfectly her need to do it. But people said to me--Claudie was one--"What are you getting into Jean? This is very macabre." I said I didn't think so at all. And I didn't. But Amelia was that way.

She came here with Lou. She was here twice, once with Mirella [Bentivoglio], who was another whole great other wonderful story. You know, I asked Amelia about her two daughters. I said, "Don't you ever discipline them?" She said, "I don't discipline them. I write manifestos to them. I write five-hundred-word manifestos." So she had a lot of spirit. Misguided I suppose, you'd have to be to write a manifesto to your own kid. Wowee. Many of these took me aback. Is the Getty interested in all this?

SMITH: I'm interested in it, so they're going to be. You

have a lot of material in the collection, and you said it's interstitial. Amelia Etlinger, there's a woman that's very talented but has no way of knowing how to build a career for herself.

BROWN: She just wanted to do her art. That's all.

SMITH: And you were her audience.

BROWN: Obviously. She used to send me plant fragments, flower fragments, but she told me she never went out. Which was hard to believe. She never went out of doors. She didn't like the out of doors. Maybe she didn't like insects. I don't know. I think something about the outdoors she didn't like. But she used a great deal of natural material in her work. I liked her. I didn't think that she was bananas. She made perfect sense to me, although she did all these funny things. But they're not so funny, are they? The spoonful of dirt.

SMITH: That doesn't sound funny to me.

BROWN: No? I understood it perfectly. Poor Lou. He was the most down-to-earth-- He was a bureaucrat who somehow could indulge her all these years. Mirella wrote and told me that he had spent hundreds and thousands of dollars trying to get her psychiatric help. But I liked her. She made sense to me. I was just very sad that she was so forlorn and that she did what she did. I have not told anybody else but you--I don't know why you're the lucky

person--how she did it. I just couldn't-- You know, people would have been too aghast. Lou called me a couple of times. He said, "Oh, she told me that--" She told him that she never wanted to or expected to live beyond fifty years. And I think it was on her fiftieth birthday. That was something strange about it, but, you know, we're all strange one way or another. And as far as the people you mentioned, that was ongoing. Anna Banana, do you know her from California?

SMITH: No. Well, I had heard of her. I never met her, no.

BROWN: She had all these olympics. She's had everybody entering into them. Most remarkable. And they were non-competitive, which won me over immediately.

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FEBRUARY 27, 1992

SMITH: I wanted to start today by asking you some more about some of the younger people that you were involved with. I thought I would start with Chuck Welch.

BROWN: The Crackerjack Kid.

SMITH: The Crackerjack Kid.

BROWN: Somebody really made up a list of all the mail artists, and I think I contacted them. I didn't hear from Chuck for a long, long time, and he suddenly appeared. He did a lot of mail art. Did I show you the photograph of his baby in the mailbox?

SMITH: Yeah. Now, how old was he, do you think, when you first got in contact with him? He looks very young in the photograph.

BROWN: He's very young. Yes, I think probably he looks younger than he is in that picture. Twenty-five when I started? I don't remember.

SMITH: With the mail art people, if they sent you something in the mail, as mail art usually arrives, would you then try to send them something for it?

BROWN: No. I didn't know what to do. My feeling was that we just had this network, that they didn't expect anything in return. And sometimes I would send-- If they

asked for anything, they certainly got it.

Jürgen Olbrich from Germany. I'm trying to think what I did about him. I don't remember. You'll find most of his things there. He wants to become another Jean Brown, he would write me. What did I ever send him? I don't remember. Well, if those notebooks of mine had not gotten taken by the Getty [Center for the History of Art and the Humanities], I might have been able-- Because I think I would have made a little note about him. I think I would have, I'm not sure. I couldn't send him anything. Except he may have asked for things, and then I would be very happy to send them. It would be very nice to send people things they really want.

SMITH: So was that going to be an exchange relationship with Olbrich?

BROWN: I can't remember.

SMITH: He'd collect things in Europe and you'd collect things here and then--

BROWN: I paid him some for whatever he had for sale. He lived right outside of Kassel, where they have the big Documenta [exhibition]. And he would set up an alternate one. People would come and stay with him during that time, and they would do projects together. I'm just trying to remember whether or not I sent him things. I can't. But if he ever asked for anything, I would have

very happily. I know that. But that doesn't answer the question either, does it? I just sent everybody anything they asked.

SMITH: And you had duplicates or--

BROWN: It need not have been archival material. It would be anything. I remember sending blue jeans.

SMITH: Oh, I see.

BROWN: Anything that I knew they really wanted. And some who told me did better than people who didn't, because I wouldn't know what to do. I knew that mail artists just send mail, not anything else. And I became part of the circuit.

SMITH: Did you send mail art back in exchange, in return?

BROWN: A letter of thanks or a letter saying something. Never mail art.

SMITH: Well, it seemes to me I saw at least one postcard that you kind of collaged together and sent to--

BROWN: I don't remember doing it.

SMITH: Oh. Maybe somebody was visiting at the time.

BROWN: It was never my intention to be thought of as an artist. I didn't want that confusion because it would have complicated the whole thing.

SMITH: With the mail artists-- I mean, it seems like most of them develop a kind of persona, like Crackerjack Kid or Pan Man or Rainbow, that becomes the person who exists

within the mail art. Was there much personal contact? I mean physical personal contact.

BROWN: Well, Betty Danon never came. I don't consider her a mail artist anyway. I think she was a fine artist who invented Rainbowland. There was always a Rainbowland stamp on all her letters.

SMITH: I think she got in trouble with the Italian post office at one point, so then she had to--

BROWN: I don't remember that. She used regular postage too. But then she'd always include her Rainbowland stamp. She was incredible. One book she did-- I can't remember what it was, but it entertained my grandchildren for a long, long time once while they were visiting. She's just remarkable I think. Now, I'd send her things but not enough. Some people I just could never repay. Crackerjack Kid, when his baby was born I sent him money, a gift for the child. And he was very pleased. But they didn't expect anything.

SMITH: Do you know what he did for a living, or does for a living?

BROWN: I don't know. His wife, I think, was studying to be a doctor. And then they moved to New Hampshire because she was going to train at the Dartmouth College hospital. I don't know what he does. He came here. I was very taken with him. He may be rearing his child. I don't

really know. It's not the kind of thing one would ask anyway. It's really none of-- I wouldn't ask anything like that.

SMITH: No. I mean, sometimes it comes up though. Again, I'm interested to what degree people were "professional artists," or that was their ambition, and to what degree they were like some of the other people that you mentioned.

BROWN: Well, do you call Ray Johnson a professional artist? A lot of them were like him. I know when I was up in Vermont visiting Dick [Higgins], he had many of Ray's works on his walls. So Ray was an artist. He made collages I think. I think they all thought they were artists. And I think I thought so, too. I fell in love with mail art, actually. Again, a protest kind of thing maybe against galleries, against commercialism of art. But they were going to make it. And I think that was what I saw in it.

SMITH: For instance, in poetry, somebody like William Carlos Williams was perfectly content to be a medical doctor all his life while writing very beautiful poetry. Wallace Stevens is another example of that. And then you have somebody like Ezra Pound, who can only function as a poet. You know, would not be able to live in any way doing any kind of nonpoetic work. It is two different

ways of viewing the relationship of art and society.

BROWN: I'm sure there are more than the two, actually.

SMITH: Right. Yeah.

BROWN: Can't stop being one thing, but willing to do others. Well, what can I tell you about Chuck Welch more than that? I know I started hearing from him. Everybody else was talking about him for quite a long time because he did make his own paper.

SMITH: Oh.

BROWN: And had a very good reputation. I'm trying to think of the basis for that reputation. He was just a fine man. I liked him very, very much.

SMITH: What about Peter Frank?

BROWN: Peter came here. When I started the archive, I knew I'd need a lot of material from New York, notices, announcements, activities. And I asked Jonathan [Brown] if there was anybody at the Institute [of Fine Arts, New York University] who could help me acquire these papers. They're just papers, really. And then a young lady--and I think she came up here--who was a graduate, had graduated from the Institute, said, "Why don't you ask Peter Frank." He's at everything. Every place I go I see Peter Frank. Well, I must have contacted him. He must have enjoyed it very much. He offered to do it. He went to everything. He would go to several events in

one night. Did you see a lot of reference to him in the--?

SMITH: Yes, there was a lot of stuff, and there seemed to be a lot of his stuff. I mean, the Cloudworks stuff seemed to be--

BROWN: No, that's not his.

SMITH: No?

BROWN: It's Geoff Hendricks who did clouds. Wonderful clouds. Maybe that's misfiled. I don't think it could have been misfiled, but it could have, too. The cloud things are Geoff Hendricks.

SMITH: Geoff Hendricks. Okay.

BROWN: And Peter came up. He was going on his first trip to Europe. I gave him a lot of my addresses. That really started his career. And then he would get me material. He'd come up here with a post office mailbag filled with things that he had collected. A year. He'd bring me a year at a time. His family had a house not far from here, a summer house. So whenever he came up, he'd dump it on me.

SMITH: So he would bring you these mailbags of stuff that he had collected.

BROWN: Well, I actually introduced him. He did several things for Fluxus. During some celebration in Germany-- What were they celebrating? It was "Soho in Berlin."

George went to that.

SMITH: George Maciunas.

BROWN: Peter was there. Peter got the job of writing it up. George met him here, liked him, and was perfectly willing to have him be a writer for Fluxus. And he did the article. I have it. You will have it there, too. It's "Soho in Berlin."

SMITH: Was this the thing that René Block was organizing?

BROWN: Could have very well been.

SMITH: And George did the Fluxlabyrinth?

BROWN: That's right. You saw that. It's there. Yes. George went at my instigation. He was boycotting Germany for three years.

SMITH: How come?

BROWN: He didn't like the Germans, didn't like them at all. Didn't want to be any part of anything. So I said to George, "You know, you're boycotting after three years. And the three years are up." He said, "I extended it three years." But he went. He was going to build that labyrinth. I said, "George, if you're not there, how do you know it will be done correctly?" This is all in teasing, like the three years. And I guess he thought seriously enough of it to go. He did not like it. He didn't like anything about it. The only thing that he liked really was going over to the east [East Berlin] and

buying wooden toys. He loved the wooden toys. But he had a very unhappy time. They stuck him way, way out in a suburb of Berlin, and they had to travel a long way every day. And he had to complete the labyrinth, which I think must have been absolutely incredible. Why do I have the impression that it was one of the really high points of the Fluxus in Berlin?

SMITH: About George-- I noticed in the correspondence there are exchanges-- Well, Vytautas Landsbergis is in your archives. Was George involved with Lithuanian nationalistic activities? I mean, did he have a sense of Lithuanian identity?

BROWN: Well, I just don't know. When things got their worst he would say, "I'll go back to Lithuania." I didn't know about Vytautas Landsbergis, I think. I don't know that he talked about him very much. But that would have been in his past. Now it's surfaced again because of what has happened in Eastern Europe.

SMITH: So he didn't project a kind of Lithuanian identity?

BROWN: No. He had a strong accent. When things got really bad, I told you, he said, "I'll go back to Lithuania." He never talked about it very much. I have Lithuanian friends in Stockbridge [Massachusetts] who knew all about him, showed me the Lithuanian Who's Who and

George's father's in it. I did one of the Mohammed things and I used his father's entry in the Lithuanian Who's Who. The rest of it, I divided in half. It was about George, the lower half. Not very important really. I don't know why I went into it even. Except that it was irresistible. I kept getting these marvelous things. I just fell in love with the idea of doing it just that way. He never talked about Lithuania very much, but then he had a lot of Lithuanian-- Lithuanians, by the way, are the most, as far as I know, ethnically bonded people. I would love it if somebody Lithuanian came here, because I'd find out more about George. But they all lapsed into Lithuanian, so I never-- The minute they got together, they would speak the mother tongue. I never got a bit. But it didn't bother me, you know. I don't know what I was seeking.

SMITH: Coming from the former Soviet Union, did he have a lot of contacts in Eastern Europe?

BROWN: He had friends here who were Lithuanian, but I don't think with anyone there. I don't know how the Landsbergis thing occurred.

SMITH: Well, I was thinking of even just like in Russia or in Poland or in Czechoslovakia or Hungary. Did he plug into any kind of network of neodada people in Eastern Europe?

BROWN: I don't think so. He was his own man and did it

his own way. Emmett Williams told me that once he wanted to fake out George and wrote to him to say that they were going to perform in the Soviet Union. And George was furious, he said--this was before I knew him--because he hadn't been included. I think George was not a communist. I think George was a Marxist. His first idea about Soho was to rent these factories--they were all factory buildings--and renovate them to being apartments for the poor. This I have a very strong feeling about, so it must be the case. But he had to go through a lot of bureaucracy. And George would never, never stand for that. I mean, it was just too far removed from anything that he would even consider. That's why the door is like-- You mentioned the door.

SMITH: Oh, the guillotine doors. Yeah.

BROWN: But they came after him. He had a confrontation with the attorney general. That's why he built that door. And he had an escape hatch. That was a most fascinating place. So that nobody could get in, and he had a way of getting out. This he invented, I think. He loved that kind of-- It was like the labyrinth.

SMITH: I mean, when he got beaten close to death by the whoever, to me it was amazing that he produced this very, very funny leaflet explaining the whole situation, and it was days afterward.

BROWN: It was amazing. He lost an eye as a result of that. And he made an event of it.

SMITH: Yeah.

BROWN: Incredible man. He was in the hospital for a long time and lost an eye and was doing these events. I didn't go down to see him at that time at all. But I got these things, and he must have written to me about them. I'm not sure. But I know I got all the results of his events. Incredible man. His health chart must have been the most incredible. He had more things ailing him. He had asthma. He never wanted anyone to smoke near him. He had a real fixation about that. He just was not well. It didn't stop him at all until he got really sick. And I told you I urged him to go to a doctor. I took him, actually, because he wanted instead to go and do a performance in New York. I said, "George, if you don't take care of your health, there will be no more performances." I said, "You better just go." So then we went to the doctor. That's when he found out he was very ill. That was very sad. Now, you were asking me about what? Peter Frank.

SMITH: Well, Peter Frank. I was confused about Cloudworks.

BROWN: Peter Frank went to-- I gave him a whole list of people to see on his trip to Europe. And it made his trip

and it made his reputation at the same time. Peter's now in Los Angeles, isn't he?

SMITH: I didn't know that.

BROWN: His wife comes from California. Jack Ox. Does that mean anything to you? She's a very good artist. She shows. I think I kept all the notices. The last time I heard from Peter was the announcement of her exhibition. He said he hadn't been east in two years or longer, I don't know. I could fish it out. And therefore I haven't seen or heard from him. He must have had a big reason for leaving New York. He chose an exhibition at the Guggenheim [Museum]. He was the selector of it. It didn't get very good reviews. It was an annual at the Guggenheim. He chose all the artists. Nobody seemed to think it was very good, and that may have discouraged him. And Jack Ox was from L.A., I think, anyway. Is there a big Peter Frank thing at the Getty?

SMITH: There was a sizable file.

BROWN: Yes, I would have put him in with the Fluxus people, because he was then writing about Fluxus. And I once said to George something about something that Peter had written. I thought it was very good, I said. He said, "Yes. And very carefully supervised by me." He said, "I had him report every day." But on the other hand, George accepted him and gave him these assignments.

Those were given to him. So he must have thought enough of him to do that. I don't know why Peter gave up on New York. I really don't know. I don't think I saw him before he left. His father was-- His father's just written a book. Ruben Frank, who was the television head of one of the very large-- What are the companies? ABC, RCA. I don't know. One of the big networks on television. And Peter was not driving then, I guess. His family, his mother and father, would drive him here, sit on the front steps, and wait for him to finish whatever he came for.

SMITH: They wouldn't come in?

BROWN: I must have--

SMITH: How old was he at the time?

BROWN: Peter was a child wonder. But he did go to everything in New York. Can you believe it? Well, I think he was-- Was he still in school when I met him? He was very young. A kind of child prodigy. He went to everything. You know, three and four things in one night. It was a very, very active time in New York. Now, we could pull out his file if we needed it. I have things from him. No, I may not have things from him. I may have put them all in the Fluxus file. I sent everything of Fluxus.

George told me-- I don't know whether [Gilbert]

Silverman or Jon Hendricks would agree, but George told me that the most important part of Fluxus was the newsletters and the correspondence. He based all of his ambitions about Fluxus on those two things. I don't know whether I had them all or not. They were kind of capriciously done. You know, every time George felt like getting a newsletter out, one would go out.

He did renovate a lot of lofts and sold them at no profit to himself. I think I thought he was a very, very bad businessman, because I think I felt that he should have become a millionaire with his idea. Because look what Soho has become, thanks to George. He did it all. He fell in love--I think I told you--with those cast-iron-front buildings. He was an architect, too. He had many, many arrows in his quiver. He could do anything. I think George was--oh, I said that earlier to you--a genius.

The fact that he didn't get along with so many people, I didn't know that. I know he could be difficult, but he'd get over it in five minutes, you know. It didn't last very long. He called me one day while the installation was being done upstairs, and he got furious about what the workmen--something I told him--had done. Well, I put them on the phone, and he got furious with them and hung up. I called him back five minutes later and he was fine. So I don't know about that part of him.

Never difficult with me. That might have been the only incident in which any anger was expressed. So it's hard for me to agree with the people who say that he was difficult. He was arbitrary.

He didn't go to museums, didn't go to galleries. But I've heard other people say that too. I once heard a panel when I was on one of the museum boards, and there was a thing by Ada Louise Huxtable, the architectural critic. She said she never went to museums or galleries because nothing compared with the excitement in the streets, which was a-- And she was a very well trained and highly professional lady. George never went out very much socially, but he liked the things that were done here. I would invite three or four young people, and he'd be very interested in them. Also, it was a very different atmosphere.

SMITH: What about Ivy Sky Rutzky?

BROWN: I have cards of hers. I don't really know.

SMITH: She seemed to be sending you a lot of things.

BROWN: And they were very nice probably, too.

SMITH: In very ephemeral media.

BROWN: I remember once asking Dick Higgins about it. He may have put her onto me. I never met her; I just got occasional things from her. And they were very nice. I remember once asking Dick about her. I really can't

remember what he said.

SMITH: Well, I know she was a dancer.

BROWN: Oh, I didn't know that.

SMITH: She was with the Judd Nelson Company. But then she would send you this, the three leaves of grass in a--

BROWN: Charming. I loved them. I do remember asking Dick about her. He never told me she was a dancer. She wrote to him that she was sending me things. That's all I know. And I must have asked him about her.

SMITH: And she also seemed to organize phone events.

BROWN: Did she?

SMITH: There are announcements. I was wondering if you had participated in the phone events.

BROWN: Do I have those in the file?

SMITH: Yes.

BROWN: Never talked to her. Never knew-- I don't even remember about the phone events, actually. [tape recorder off]

SMITH: Were there many people doing phone events? Was that a form that--?

BROWN: It seems to me no. You know, if you were a mail artist, you didn't use a phone. I used to tease people who would call me and who were mail artists. I don't know of any phone events. I don't even remember about Ivy Sky Rutzky. All I know is that she wrote to Dick, he told me,

and she was very pleased that I had answered. I'm not sure, but this became a place where people could check in in whatever way they wanted. I never thought about it in that way. That would have indicated that maybe they thought it was important to be part of it. I was not interested in that part of it at all. If they came I was very happy. If they didn't, I'd get something else.

SMITH: A big thing in the seventies--I mean, it starts in the seventies--is video art. Of course there's Nam June Paik, but it's everywhere.

BROWN: I was ready to do it, but I'm not the least bit mechanical. I would have had great problems with it. I could not have known how to manipulate the medium really.

SMITH: Even getting a playback machine or--

BROWN: As a matter of fact, I talked to Jan van der Marck about it. I said, "I'm thinking of doing this." He said, "Jean, something happens to them if you play them. Something happens to them if you don't play them." Obviously. And I never knew why, but I quickly gave up the idea. I had thoughts about it. Some great things were being done.

SMITH: It was a very prolific aspect of that whole--however we want to call it.

BROWN: And there were many major artists who got themselves involved in it.

SMITH: Yes.

BROWN: But I didn't do anything. That was all I needed to hear for me. I was still using a pen and paper, you know, and I don't even know how to type. That was a confusion about the whole thing, this vanguard collection using nineteenth-century technology. I used to laugh at myself. But it didn't matter as long as it produced a result. That's all I cared about. I wanted to do it.

SMITH: Another person I wanted to talk to you about was Steve Random.

BROWN: He came here a lot. Sent me loads of things, as you observed. I liked Steve. He lived not too far away. And he'd come a lot, and he'd send me things a lot. He did word play, all kinds of marvelous things. I thought he was very clever. He had arranged a mail art exhibit of my mail art at the University of Massachusetts [University] Gallery.

SMITH: But you didn't lend.

BROWN: I didn't lend. Hugh Davies. Do you know that name?

SMITH: Yes.

BROWN: Hugh was then the director. I knew him very well, and he was very open and very receptive. Well, no, I think probably Steve would have gotten all the people to contribute. I would not have had to lend. He had it organized. And then Hugh got the job in California.

SMITH: What was that?

BROWN: I didn't care.

SMITH: That's too bad, though.

BROWN: Why?

SMITH: Well, it would have been nice to let people wander through the galleries and see.

BROWN: Know what was happening in mail art.

SMITH: Yeah.

BROWN: It was anti-museum, though.

SMITH: Well, yeah.

BROWN: It didn't matter. I just felt bad that Steve, who went to all that effort-- Somewhere I have a correspondence about that, I think. He didn't get it done. I think he might have felt badly, but I didn't care. And Hugh was wonderful to want to do it.

SMITH: Now, Steve did-- There's a thing in the files called--I guess it's like a rayogram--Essence of Jean Brown. Do you remember that?

BROWN: No. He did a lot of very, very clever things though. And very much under the influence of Marcel Duchamp. I remember that. I liked him. I don't know what happened to him. He went up to Maine. I did get a letter from him recently, though. He connected with somebody that I knew in Connecticut. I think he told me he was working with him and thanked me. That may be the

BROWN: Doing what? Do you know?

SMITH: No. [tape recorder off]

BROWN: On to the text.

SMITH: The next one was I wanted to ask you about the interdada festivals in San Francisco.

BROWN: Yes. Who sent me all those papers. The whole thing.

SMITH: I guess Ginni Lloyd or--

BROWN: Ginni. Do you know Ginni?

SMITH: No, I don't.

BROWN: Do you know of her?

SMITH: I know of her, yeah.

BROWN: She and [Lon] Spiegelman. Do you know about Spiegelman?

SMITH: Yes.

BROWN: I think they sent me all of it. I don't know that I thought it was particularly impressive.

SMITH: No?

BROWN: I was getting a lot of stuff. I tried very hard to get things from Eastern Europe, because there was no movement back and forth and I thought maybe I'd be able to build a little bridge. And who did I get? A wonderful letter. I'll think of her name. Well, let's leave that.

SMITH: The Gerlovins [Rimma and Valery]? No.

BROWN: No. They were here. I almost had it, but anyway,

maybe I'll think of it. I got a call one day from a woman. She was Czech. The couple I'm thinking of were Hungarian.

SMITH: Oh, the Galántais [György and Julia].

BROWN: Exactly. And I loved what they were doing. You know, then my trying to connect and bring art-- I did it all for nothing, because the Soviet Union has broken up anyway. I did a lot. I had that feeling that I wanted the exchange anyway. Maybe that would help. I got a call from a woman. I think she was at the Czech embassy in New York. Somehow a grant of $5,000 had been given to the Galántais, and she wanted me to know it. In fact she wanted to send it to me so they could pick it up when they came. I said, "Oh, no, please don't send it to me." I said, "I don't want it. Leave it at their embassy, because if they come they'll probably check in there, too." But then I wanted very much to have them come during that Interdada whatever you just mentioned.

SMITH: Oh, the interdada festival. Right.

BROWN: I thought they would get right in the thick of things very quickly. It would be a wonderful way to be introduced to this country. But then I never heard any more. I never heard from the lady, I never heard from them. I wonder if somehow a restriction was put on them, because the whole thing ended so abruptly. And wanting to

send me the money, which I thought was the strangest thing possible. I did not want it. I didn't want to have to worry about it or take care of it and wonder when they would pick it up. She was a lovely lady--I must have her in the file, too--who had dedicated herself to her art.

SMITH: Did you see a difference between the Soviet bloc neodada work and what was being done in Western Europe?

BROWN: Oh, they were very good. No, it was global. What they were doing was global. Who else? That raindrop guy. Very good.

SMITH: Then there was Milan Knižak.

BROWN: He was very much Fluxus. If you look at my collection there, there's a hundred mark edition. And he did wonderful things. He did Mizak, multiples, large editions. I was on standing order to him, too. I got everything. Because those were the Fluxus artists, a lot of them, in the East.

SMITH: You mentioned that now he's an official in the government.

BROWN: I read that someplace. This guy who was almost put in jail. And Hans Sohm was picked up at the border. He had gone over to-- I'm trying to remember where Milan was from. I'm not sure.

SMITH: He's from Czechoslovakia.

BROWN: Hans Sohm went over to get his things and got

picked up by the police at the border, and they detained him. I don't know what else happened. But I remember signing some kind of a petition to have-- I don't know what. I forget. But I signed it. Everybody must have. To release Knižak from jail maybe. Ken Friedman was very active in that. Everybody was I think, though. When was this? Maybe after George's demise. I don't remember.

SMITH: Do you still hear from people in Europe? Do they write to you?

BROWN: If any of them wrote me I wouldn't answer, and that would end it, I think. I think I just-- I'd have to look in my files.

SMITH: Is there anybody you do answer?

BROWN: I can't say so. I haven't even answered John Furnival. Because I realize that this just induces a response, and then I would feel I owed a response. So I think that I just very carelessly, almost cruelly, cut it all out. I couldn't do it anymore.

SMITH: Are you still following the neodada or postdada art movements?

BROWN: I get all the art journals. I read about it. If I see any publications, I'll read the reviews. I don't really do anything. I'm retired, dear. Retired and retarded both.

SMITH: In looking at some of the later material, it

struck me that it was less conceptual. Maybe I'm looking at it incorrectly, but there was a drift towards a sentimentality or--

BROWN: And whatever gave you that notion? Do you remember?

SMITH: Well, looking at some of the interdada festival material. Betty Danon. The Cloudworks. Rutzky. And then it was combined with material that was just out and out pornography.

BROWN: Did I have that too?

SMITH: Yeah. You have that. You have some pretty--

BROWN: Wild things?

SMITH: Yeah. Pretty wild things. Yeah.

BROWN: What? I can't remember. I would have kept them in any event. If they somehow related to the archive, I would have kept them, no doubt. And filed them. What kind of pornography do I have? Do you remember?

SMITH: Well, some stuff from Germany that was--

BROWN: Wild, huh.

SMITH: I mean photographs of people urinating in each other's mouths.

BROWN: Oh, well, that was the Austrian group. Very, very, very important. I got all of those. Orgiastic ritual things. Very, very important artists who were doing this, who saw that way of doing it. Yes, I remember

those very well. I was very pleased to have them, too. They're wild.

SMITH: Yes.

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BROWN: Most people have achieved international status, though. It's their way of handling it. You know, that exhibition, [Andres Serrano's] Piss Christ, you know that thing at the-- That is an aspect of it. I had all those things. Isn't that awful. I don't remember their names. I got a lot of those from Herman Nitsch Otto Mühl. If you will look, you will see that he published a great many of-- I don't know what happened to them. I don't know whether they're still going on and I've just withdrawn or whether they have too. I just don't have any contact or any curiosity, actually. Oh, I thought those were pretty extraordinary. Scary almost.

SMITH: Yes, some of them.

BROWN: But human sacrifice is very old, you know. And I think they picked up on that. Well, they had a whole other vision about art which-- I don't know whether I accept it or not or whether I just thought it belonged in the archive, you see. If it had a place there I would have it, because, again, my being nonjudgmental about things. I went to Vienna--this was after Leonard [Brown] died--and I went to a bookshop I had been at with Leonard. I said, "I might be very interested in seeing some of

these people." Otto Mühl was one. There was a note for me on cardboard inviting me to come to the studio, where they would show me great things. But I never got there. I think I thought they were shocking but important. Then again, I said I was not judgmental. If it had a place it would be there, if I could lay my hands on it.

SMITH: Let's shift a little bit. You've talked about the research center aspect, the study center. How did you organize the materials?

BROWN: I had them arranged by category. This unlisted, uncataloged material-- I put my hands on everything I needed. I could arrange it in a way that made it accessible to me or to anybody who came. I could just slip it off the shelf. There was a great sense of order, but nothing on paper. And ultimately Jonathan and I-- Well, when I talked about it. I hardly ever talked about it to the kids. But he said that my responsibility should be acquisition and preservation. "Don't worry about anything else, Ma. Somebody else can come along and do that." The rest of it.

SMITH: The organizing, yeah.

BROWN: And I think that's what I used as my guideline.

SMITH: So you had it divided up according to those--

BROWN: Sections.

SMITH: --sections that you had mentioned earlier.

BROWN: Yes.

SMITH: What about people coming to use? How did that work? Did they have to write to you--? Well, obviously they had to write to you, but did you have guidelines in terms of who you would let use the--?

BROWN: I would admit anybody who seemed to have a valid reason for wanting to come. And so that was the way it was done.

SMITH: What would be an invalid reason?

BROWN: Well, I would accept no undergraduates, for one thing, because they were too diffused in their desires. Well, people who offered proper credentials would be answered, and we would make dates. And Eric Vos was one of them. But he wrote to me a long, long time. He just wanted to get here someday. And I said, "Let me know when."

SMITH: Did you put any kinds of controls on people's use of the material?

BROWN: I don't think so. I know that I used to have the graduate students from the Rhode Island School of Design, and they came as a group. And one day I realized-- I let them riffle around. I mean, what they were coming for was open shelves, and everybody could-- And one day I did miss something, which was too bad. It was a Milan Knižak thing, as a matter of fact. I thought, "My God. Do I

have to worry about security? If it comes to that, I better not have groups anymore." And I stopped the groups.

SMITH: How many people could you accommodate at one time?

BROWN: I think I once counted and there were ten or eleven people working around the big table. I would show them where the material was, and once they got going they would find it. I told you about Fred Truck's book on George Maciunas [George Maciunas: Fluxus and the Face of Time]. I didn't even know he was doing it here. I was flabbergasted when I found that he had gotten all the material for that book here. It all worked. It wasn't always like that. Well, I couldn't ever have done it if it were-- I mean, this is my home, you see. Well, it had many advantages, because I didn't have to get up and go to work. You know, I still lived here. I think it was rather a strange arrangement, but it worked.

SMITH: Did you frequently talk to people about their projects when they came?

BROWN: Of course. I told you, we'd sit around a table. I provided meals because there was no place to eat. There are no restaurants. No public transportation.

SMITH: Did you have to go pick people up from the bus station?

BROWN: They came by bus. I did that too. They would have no way of getting here otherwise.

SMITH: Taxi.

BROWN: Well, they didn't have the means. And that's a real luxury.

SMITH: But you didn't provide lodging for people?

BROWN: At the beginning I did. Then I couldn't. And I found a farmhouse in town. The Appalachian trail goes through Tyringham [Massachusetts], and there was this woman in town who took in hikers. Well, this was perfect for me. It was very inexpensive for my people. And I'd either let them take my car and go down there to stay or I'd pick them up in the morning. It was a strange arrangement, but very, very suitable for me in this place.

SMITH: And if people wanted to copy materials, how did that operate?

BROWN: We'd tour over to the Lee [Massachusetts] library and use the Xerox machine. Or if they let me know what they needed, I would do it after they'd left and mail it on. I got very good at remembering to tell people to take everything they brought, because I would have to send it otherwise. I would remind them.

SMITH: Did you charge anything for the use of the facilities?

BROWN: Of course not. Why would I?

SMITH: Just your expenses, the photocopying or--

BROWN: Never. I could do it. You know, it wasn't that

costly. Also, it sustained me. I still think that I owed it more than it ever owed me or the people owed me. It kept me going. I was very grateful to it and to them.

SMITH: I was wondering about the exchange agreements that you entered into. You did have an exchange agreement with Plinio Mesculiam, did you not?

BROWN: I paid him.

SMITH: Oh, you paid him. I guess I was thinking about exchange agreements where you send material and--

BROWN: He never asked me for anything. Sent me a couple of books that are there--leather, beautifully bound--of his artwork, you know. Didn't mean that much to me. I just loved his project. I purchased that. There's another thing there that is very important, rubber stamp art. I think I mentioned to you what I saw about it. I wrote to Hervé Fischer in Paris and asked him if I could have the whole project, and I bought that. Did I tell you the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris and the Bibliothèque nationale in Belgium and I had the only copies that were extant?

SMITH: Oh, right. Yes.

BROWN: You should look at it. I don't know if the Getty knows they have a lot of these things, but they'll find out. Who is the man who is cataloging the collection? Do you know his name? The name of the man at the Getty. I

had a letter from him. I don't remember his name. [Eric Vos] He asked me about certain things. And I said to him, "I think that my head went to the Getty with all the material because--" But I knew where he could find out. Jon Hendricks would know in a minute. And I wrote to him. I don't know what happened then. I was no big help to him in any case, and I should have been. But they had everything. I didn't have anything, any reference material either, obviously. But that rubber stamp thing, it was a very deluxe finding. I don't think anyone's ever asked me about it, but that to me was very special. Just as the Mohammed was. This young man came. Hervéy Fischer did it. Rubber stamped. Everybody went into that, too. And he brought it. Came with his wife. Stayed a few days. I asked him what he thought of-- He was very, very proud of the fact that he had titularization at the University of Paris. Tenure. And I asked him what he thought of the deconstructionists, and he said he didn't like them at all. They were intellectual tyrants.

SMITH: Yes, you mentioned that. Yes.

BROWN: I did tell you that. That's a wonderful project. Something that was again irresistible. You'd look at it, you'd think, "Boy, I want to be in it." You know? And for large group things, that's unusual, I think. Very

carefully collected all of this.

SMITH: How did the rubber stamp of you get created? Do you recall that?

BROWN: Was there more than one?

SMITH: Well, I've only seen the one with you and the Guggenheim coming out of your head.

BROWN: Oh. You know, I never saw that stamp. I just saw the card. I collected the artifacts themselves. A lot of them were sent to me. I never finished that project, though. I would have commissioned artists to make rubber stamps if they were-- To make the artifact. I would pay them for it. And I don't remember how much. I have no idea. But I could, you know, look through my files and determine that. And I would pay them for them. I don't remember how much. I have no idea. I was very interested in any mass media. Multiples. I told you it was an anti-gallery, anti-museum protest. I wanted these things out. I thought they belonged in the public domain.

SMITH: Well, I have a few more names that I wanted to throw at you. This relates to the Eastern European connections: Rimma Gerlovina and Valery Gerlovin, the two Russians.

BROWN: They did the video of me. They wrote to me. They had left Russia and emigrated, and once you left Russia you could not return. Mirella Bentivoglio had used Rimma

Gerlovina's work. She did a section of the Venice Bienalle of Women's Art, and Rimma was in it. So she knew Rimma, and then when she heard they were emigrating, she said, "The first place you have to go and see is Jean Brown's." And George Maciunas designed stationery for me--you'll see it there--which was a map. They came here. They landed here by using that map. And they would still be coming. I was extremely fond of both of them, but I can't do it anymore. They came a lot. Then one day--I think I told you this--I got a call from Martha Wilson at Franklin Furnace: "Break down, Jean. Show your collection."

SMITH: Right, yes. You mentioned that, yeah.

BROWN: But I suggested the Gerlovins, and they did a great, great exhibition. Samizdat art.

SMITH: Did you collect much of the samizdat art?

BROWN: Not enough. In Russia I was told it was impossible. They must have told me that it was impossible. But whatever else I could get of Eastern Europe I tried. I don't know what it would add up to, what that corpus would look like if it were judged and put together. I don't know. I kept trying for it. Then a wonderful-- I loved that man. He was very, very ill. Dick went. I told Dick to give him some money, which Dick did.

SMITH: Dick Higgins we're talking about.

BROWN: Uh-huh. I wish I could think of his name. [Pawel Petasz] He was an incredible artist. Very ill, Dick told me. He wanted so much to leave. Actually, I thought he was just among the very greats. I only have little things, archival material. But I really thought so highly of him. Why did Dick go? I'm trying to remember why Dick went to Eastern Europe. Oh, Dick had a finger in every pie. You know, Dick is just incredible. But I can't remember why that occurred.

SMITH: Then Eric Anderson?

BROWN: He was here. He's a Fluxus artist from Denmark. Fun things. Typically Fluxus, you know. Esprit de Fluxus. What else did I want to tell you? Well, I had a lot of things. I tried to have everything of the Fluxus artists. I don't know whether I did or not.

SMITH: Then I wanted to ask you about the Finlays [Ian Hamilton and Sue]. You mentioned them a little bit, but-- Did they ever visit you?

BROWN: No. I think he's a very difficult man, too. He got into scraps with everybody. But then he had this great thing of the case. I don't know, somebody sued him or he sued somebody, and the notoriety of that made him an international figure. But he is an extraordinary artist. Always in collaboration. His garden-- My friend from the

Rhode Island School of Design went there, Tom Ockerse. In fact he took some films of it, movie films. And he showed them one day. Brought them with him when he came up. I was delighted to see them.

SMITH: You said you always tried to maintain-- I had a note that you contributed in '75 to the Word and Image Equations. The way I read that is that you contributed a work.

BROWN: A work. I don't remember. Where was it? Do you remember?

SMITH: Well, it was Tom Ockerse.

BROWN: He asked if he could bring a group up. He was having a summer seminar. Who came with him? He and one of the Fluxus artists were holding the seminar at the Rhode Island School of Design, and they all came up. The whole group came up. I wish I could remember who was working with him on it because I liked that person very much. A visual poet. A Fluxus man. Charming. I liked him. Maybe I'll think of it. [davi det hompson] I have the catalog of that, in any case.

SMITH: Then one artist that's in your collection has since--it seems to me--become very, very well known, and that's Daniel Spoerri.

BROWN: He was in. He always was. The restaurant had a

lot of-- He even ran a restaurant for a while. He always was. He came to Springfield [Massachusetts]. Stayed overnight.

SMITH: Oh, so that would be in the sixties, then.

BROWN: A very important Fluxus artist, actually. He came with [Javacheff] Christo. Did I tell you that Christo's son marched up with a BB gun?

SMITH: Yes.

BROWN: He was there then. Leonard would always go out every Sunday morning to get the newspaper. He got the paper, and, coincidentally, in the New York Times there was an article about Spoerri. So when Christo came down before Spoerri, we quickly made up a package, a Christo package to honor the occasion. And then the bets were on. Would he leave it intact as a Christo package, or would he open it to take out the contents? Christo's wife, I think, bet on the fact that he would open it. Because-- I just grabbed things, you know, had done it very quickly, because he might be getting up any moment. Christo's wife bet that he would open it because it had a bottle of wine in it. And he came down. He opened it. I don't know what I would have done. What would you have done? Preserved it as a Christo package or opened it? Well, it was a fun thing. That was a very fun weekend. Spoerri had a restaurant. Spoerri did incredible things. He used

things that would be horizontal and arrange them vertically for hanging. Kind of, you know, unusual--seeing things in an unusual manner. And you would remember them. He was very, very good at it, I must say. Went to a Greek island for a year. Immediately started a publication which went to California. And he loved Leonard. In that package at our house was a little piece of-- Just a head of a little pre-Columbian figure which he loved and which he looked at and admired every day and kept it with him always. It was a fun thing. Just a little head.

SMITH: An actual pre-Columbian figure or a replication?

BROWN: We bought as many-- Well, we didn't buy enough. I should have gotten more in Mexico. The kids would dig them up. And you could probably buy them for one peseta, something like that. A peso. It was in Mexico. It's pesos. And he loved that. He had it with him all the time. I think he wrote Leonard a little letter telling him that. And that little publication he did--he was on the island of Simi--it's a very good one. He did several numbers of it. He was a very close friend of Emmett's. They were real buddies. [tape recorder off]

He and Emmett Williams had a beautiful example of a napkin, a cloth napkin, which listed Emmett Williams's and Daniel Spoerri's invention of the spaghetti sandwich.

Very formal. It's in the papers.

SMITH: Did you have any connection with Joseph Beuys?

BROWN: No. I just loved his things and I-- Again, every little scrap. I don't know how I felt about it. But I thought it was very, very important. Very Teutonic. Almost Wagnerian, a lot of his things are. And I saved everything.

SMITH: I was looking if you had documentation of-- I think the group he was involved with was called Cream Cheese.

BROWN: Don't know that.

SMITH: Which was a Fluxus-related group in Düsseldorf.

BROWN: George-- This is crazy, but George was a high priest of Fluxus. He told me that he never thought Beuys was a Fluxus artist. But obviously it didn't matter. Because George was sort of like André Breton. You were ruled out or in or-- And that was always subject to change anyway. Dictatorial about it.

SMITH: At the Düsseldorf museum [Nordrhein-Westfalischen Kunstmuseum] they have a room that is a Fluxus room that includes-- That's where much of Beuys's material is.

BROWN: Well, George never-- He would have been too Teutonic, too serious probably, for George. George liked play. But he did do a couple of Fluxus events, and who's to judge, you know. Even I thought that way about George.

Of course that happened with Breton, too, and the surrealists who were ruled in and out of it all very quickly, very summarily. Again, this is part of what I say. I was not judgmental. I may have opinions, but I don't have judgments. If I thought there was a place for that person in the context of the archive, that was enough.

SMITH: How much personal contact did you have with Ray Johnson?

BROWN: He came here once. He was doing silhouettes and needed a mirror image. And he would do the silhouette and he would send it to me, but I never got it. I think he may have disappeared, and I don't know why. Dick was a person who had marvelous things of his. He had them hanging in Vermont. I'd never seen any before, and I was very taken with them, actually. Dick must still have them, I think. Oh, he has moved from Vermont. Do you hear much about him at the Getty? No, huh?

SMITH: I don't, but then that's--

BROWN: I have massive files, it seems to me, of Dick. He's so prolific. He sent a letter to Bob [Robert Brown] and Susan [Reinhold]--they got it a couple of weeks ago--about an artist they had never heard of, I had never heard of. I've forgotten his name. There was not very much about him, but Dick would love to dig up, you know, people

and present them if they had been ignored in their lifetime. He did this wonderful thing of Giordano Bruno, fourteenth-century monk. He had somebody translate all the Italian, and he edited the whole thing. I don't think he would have rewritten it. But someone who had never been properly recognized. I don't remember the name of the person. But he just gets into these esoteric things, and he's very good at it. And these people deserve to be on record.

SMITH: Then we've mentioned Ay-O.

BROWN: George loved Ay-O. Tactile boxes. I went to an exhibition in New York. I forget where. A whole room of Ay-O's tactile boxes. And I went in. You put your hand in, you get a response from metal, anything you can think of. I remember walking around that whole room and doing every one of them, because I knew George was going to ask me questions and I wanted to be prepared. George loved those boxes. Did you see them at--?

SMITH: Yes, I did. They don't allow you to--

BROWN: Well, people did here. George thought they were very great. And Ay-O is a very dear man also. Very special. George had a room of all Ay-O's boxes. He had them stored in the basement of his house in New Marlborough [Massachusetts]. Didn't know what to do with them, but wanted them obviously. And one night Ay-O came

up to Billie [Hutching Maciunas]-- George was then gone. Ay-O came up and they had a big, big bonfire of them. They came by the next day to tell me about it. And I looked at Billie and I was very-- "You have a Walpurgisnacht and you didn't even invite me?" I had, you know, extended myself for her. I thought she should have asked me or told me or something. I don't know whether I would have gone or not, but I should have been-- I would have liked being informed.

SMITH: And Ay-O wanted to destroy the boxes?

BROWN: Didn't know what else to do with them.

SMITH: You could have taken them.

BROWN: Nobody offered them to me. Again, out of scale with what I had. I don't know whether I would have or not. I had some lovely Ay-O boxes which George had him make or they were already made, I don't know, but I had them. They were such fun.

SMITH: I was going to ask you about your ability to make contact with artists in Japan and East Asia.

BROWN: It was one group I longed to get. I put out so many feelers about them. I never got it. And there's a whole series of events in the Gutai group, Gutai, which was very close in spirit to Fluxus. I would have liked everything of theirs. I really tried. I worked on that. I came very close.

One of the wonderful artists from Japan-- George brought over several artists from Japan and underwrote their entry. I guess they had to be proposed or-- I don't know, but he did it. Mieko Shiomi. If you think of it, look at her things, because they're really quite extraordinary. And then somebody wrote to me-- I saw 80 Langston Street. Do you know that place in California? Is it in San Francisco? I've forgotten where. I used to get all their bulletins. And one day someone had given a lecture on the Gutai group. A guy by the name of Moore. And I was very, very eager, as I told you. I wrote to him and told him that I had long desired to have their records in my archive. Well, he said he was going back to Japan. I asked him to look up Mieko. She took him to every one of the Gutai group artists. He was delighted with this. But I never heard from him again. Couldn't work out anything. I don't have the Gutai papers.

SMITH: That's too bad. Maybe it was the sort of thing where you needed to go there and--

BROWN: And I wouldn't have gone.

SMITH: Yeah?

BROWN: And Mieko wrote me about him, as a matter of fact. They were meant to be-- I would suggest that if the Getty could acquire them, they would be useful.

SMITH: They would augment what you'd--

BROWN: You know, I don't know what they mean to do with all this, but-- John Cage was here. He had performed in Japan. He knew of the Gutai group. They influenced a very, very important French artist. What's his name? It may come to me. He used to do events and dress in the suitable garb for the event. One doesn't hear very much of him now, but I thought he was pretty important at one point. But he got all of his information and basis for his art from Japan and the Gutai group. There was a spurt of activity about him, and I can't remember him, but I think he's very important.

SMITH: We'll fill in the name. We'll get it.

BROWN: Let's make one up.

SMITH: That would be too Fluxus.

BROWN: I would have liked to know more about them and have their records. I have a lot of Japanese correspondence stuff. One of the people was formerly a member of the Gutai group. There's a union, an artist's union in Japan. I think they all register with that union and then they have access to each other through it. Now I'm sitting here annoyed with myself that I can't remember the name of the French artist. I never could get him either.

SMITH: Why not?

BROWN: I wrote to him and he never answered. He's a high

priest. I think they hold him in-- It seems to me I read somewhere that the French government had sort of adopted him, provided housing, whatever else he needed. It would be nice to remember the name.

SMITH: Well, we'll get it. [Georges Mathieu] Okay. Well, shifting a little bit, I wanted to ask you about your involvement with the Fluxus Buffet des Chefs.

BROWN: Never came off.

SMITH: It never happened, I know, but--

BROWN: I just got the announcements of it.

SMITH: That was it?

BROWN: And letters from people who were going to participate in it, Fluxus artists. Ben Patterson wrote. A lot of them wrote to me. Somebody had a big notion that never was realized.

SMITH: Seemed like a very pricey affair.

BROWN: Was it? I would have liked having all the records, but it never transpired. I don't even know whether I would have gone. But I wanted to have it on record. Of course George would have called that a "swindle." One of his announcements for films-- I didn't go. He said, "You didn't miss a thing, Jean. All we did was flash the names on the screen." All alone. All the important artists that would be there. That was a swindle. I loved that word. But so was the thing you

just mentioned too.

SMITH: What is your involvement with the development of the Fluxus Codex?

BROWN: Not much.

SMITH: Did Hendricks use the materials here?

BROWN: By then Silverman had everything, just about, except the correspondence. I told Jon what I told you, that George thought the newsletters and the correspondence were the key elements of Fluxus. And Jon came up with a Xerox machine, spent a couple of days here and took whatever Silverman didn't have. He was preparing the codex, and that took a long, long time. Incredible work. But he had help. I think we all wondered what a book on Fluxus would be like. I don't think I ever envisioned anything like that. But that was Jon's way of doing it. And it, you know, helped to stir the pot. How would I have done it? I don't know.

SMITH: How would George have done it, do you think?

BROWN: Very good question. I don't know. He would probably have referred to the newsletters and the correspondence, which he said was the most important thing and told me I had it all. I don't believe that I did. You know, he forgot I think a lot. But he told me that. And then his chart-- He said all the Fluxus events were very carefully listed. He did not really want to

circulate that chart because it was incomplete. I've forgotten what the cutoff year was.

SMITH: I think '71 or '72, something like that.

BROWN: He died I think in '77.

SMITH: 'Seventy-eight.

BROWN: 'Seventy-eight. I remember calling Bob, my son, and telling him I wanted George's obituary in the New York Times. I said not because he would have wanted it, but because I thought it should be there. And it was. Bob got it in. And that's sometimes when I cry.

SMITH: Well, I've come to the end of my questions.

BROWN: You've finished with me. Had your fun, now you're done.

SMITH: But I'd like-- You know, if you have anything further you'd like to add to close this portion of it out.

BROWN: You know, I don't even consider myself ex-Fluxus anymore. It's just I'm out of it.

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